

GREAT LIVES

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A complete list of the GREAT LIVES with the authors' names
can be had on application.

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WELLINGTON

by C. R. M. F. CRUTTWELL

Great Lives

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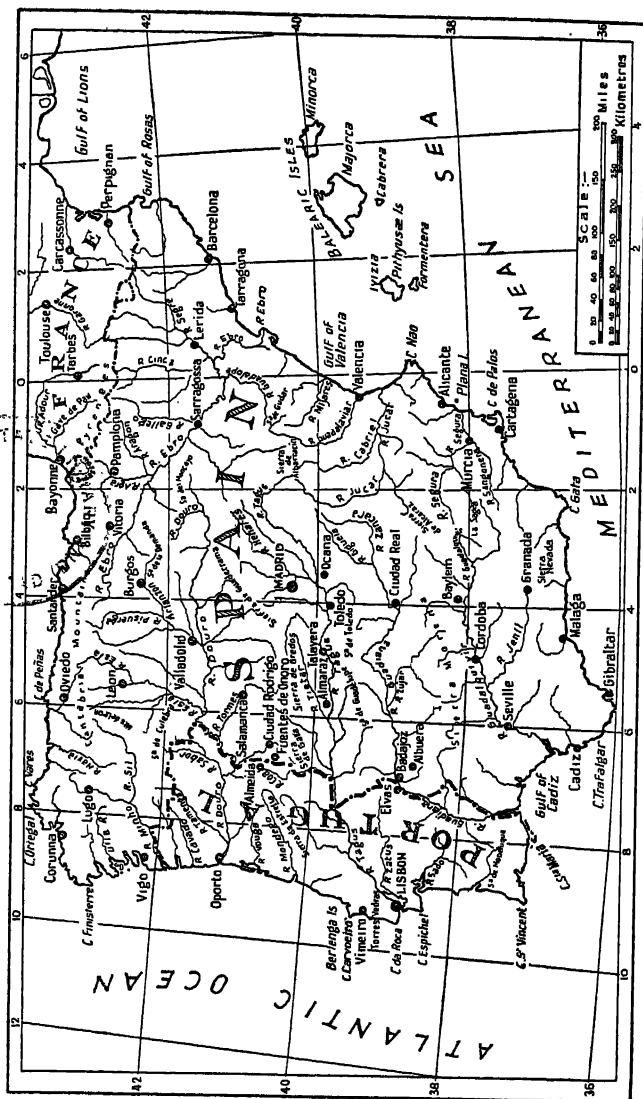
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To
SIR CHARLES OMAN

ASATIA



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CHRONOLOGY

1769	Mar. 1st.	Born.
1787	Mar. 7th.	Commissioned as ensign.
1793	Sept. 30th.	Lieutenant-Colonel.
1794	June.	Embarks for Belgium.
1797	February.	Arrival at Calcutta.
1799	May 4th.	Capture of Seringapatam.
1803	Aug. 6th.	First Mahratta War begins.
1803	Sept. 23rd.	Battle of Assaye.
1805	Sept. 10th.	Return to England.
1807	Aug.—Sept.	Expedition to Copenhagen.
1808	April 25th.	Lieutenant-General.
1808	Aug. 21st.	Vimeiro.
1809	May 12th.	Passage of Douro.
1809	July 28th.	Talavera.
1810	Sept. 27th.	Bussaco.
1810	Oct. 10th.	Enters lines of Torres Vedras.
1811	May 4th.	Fuentes d'Onoro.
1812	Jan. 19th.	Storm of Ciudad Rodrigo.
1812	April 6th.	Storm of Badajoz.
1812	July 22nd.	Salamanca:
1812	Aug. 12th.	Capture of Madrid.
1813	June 21st.	Vitoria.
		Field Marshal

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| 1813 | Nov. 10th. | Passage of Nivelles and invasion of France. |
| 1814 | April 10th | Toulouse. |
| 1814 | July 5th. | Ambassador at Paris. |
| 1815 | Jan. 24th. | Plenipotentiary at Vienna. |
| 1815 | June 18th. | Waterloo. |
| 1818 | Nov. 21st. | Army of Occupation withdrawn. |
| 1818 | Dec. 26th. | Cabinet Minister. |
| 1822 | Oct. 22nd. | Congress of Verona. |
| 1826 | Feb. 8th. | Mission to St. Petersburg. |
| 1827 | Jan. 22nd. | Commander-in-Chief. |
| 1828 | Feb. 14th. | Prime Minister. |
| 1830 | Nov. 16th. | Resignation. |
| 1832 | June 7th. | Reform Act. |
| 1834 | Jan. 29th. | Chancellor of University of Oxford. |
| 1834 | Nov. 15th | Receives Seals for Peel's Government. |
| 1841 | June 23rd. | Cabinet Minister. |
| 1846 | June 25th. | Passing of Corn Laws.
Fall of Peel's Cabinet. |
| 1848 | April 8th. | Defence of London against Chartists. |
| 1852 | Sept. 18th. | Death. |

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE AND MILITARY APPRENTICESHIP

Birth and parentage – Colleys, Wesleys, and Wellesleys – boyhood and education – awkwardness and lack of promise – relegated to the army – military and political life in Dublin – active service in Flanders – disastrous retreat of 1794-5.

ARTHUR WELLESLEY, who personified in the most powerful degree the abilities and characteristics of the great governing aristocracy, of which he became the unrivalled head, was born in Dublin in 1769. His family, settled in Dublin for four hundred years, had austere refrained from mingling their conquering stock with that of the natives. Till 1728 this obscure line of squires had borne the name of Colley, exchanged for that of Wesley by a fortunate marriage with an heiress. Arthur's father had become the Earl of Mornington, a member of the Irish House of Lords, and a leader of Dublin society. Before the close of the century Wesley itself was found to have a plebeian ring, and its more sonorous variant was adopted by the family, at the moment when its most famous member was sailing to India to lay the foundations of his glory.

As a member of such a Protestant, alien, and ruling caste, Arthur Wellesley inherited much hardness and lack of sympathy, but neither that spirit of self-seeking with which his brothers were

justly charged nor that readiness to condone if not to practise corruption which so readily beset the public men of that age. At the same time other influences far gentler and more humane had their share in his moulding. His father was an accomplished musician, whose madrigals and glees enjoyed a wide popularity, and whose anthems and chants may still be heard in our cathedrals. Arthur himself as a youth was fond of playing the violin, though military life seems before long to have killed this æsthetic bud. Yet it seems true that he possessed a strong emotional nature, rigidly repressed and disciplined by continual exercise of mind and body in the public service. Certainly as a boy and young man he showed all that shyness, *gaucherie*, and reticence so often characteristic of those who find great difficulty in harmonising strong opposing currents in their nascent character.

Nor was his progress made easier by the death of his father in 1781, for increasing pecuniary difficulties led to his withdrawal from Eton at sixteen, just the age when he might have expected a freer and less self-conscious intercourse to be opening with his schoolfellows. Still more unfortunate was his mother's attitude. She could not fail to contrast Arthur with the magnificent Richard, the eldest son, nine years his senior, the cynosure of Eton and Christ Church, and already on the certain threshold of a distinguished career in Parliament. Arthur, on the other hand, was

awkward and gawky, and so she concluded – rather oddly to our ears – that he must be an officer, “food for powder and no more.” Dragged at his mother’s heels to a lodging-house life in Brussels, he was finally despatched to a French establishment at Angers. This was not a crammer’s, but a kind of vague finishing-school where young gentlemen, including a number of English, were taught deportment, fencing, and equitation, together with a certain modicum of more intellectual subjects, before choosing a profession. In later life Arthur spoke of it in terms of a faint affection.

However, it is certain that he had scarcely begun his education, and shown not a glimpse of future promise, when he received a commission just before his eighteenth birthday. There was, of course, no examination in those easy days; everything was arranged through the airy solicitation of his brother Richard to the Lord-Lieutenant. “A younger brother of mine is here at this moment and perfectly idle. It is a matter of indifference to me what commission he gets, provided he gets it soon.” Thus the second greatest of all our soldiers was thrown into the army, apparently without the slightest inclination on his part, as into a scrap-heap for worthless characters.

The army into which the young ensign was thus unceremoniously dumped was in a wretched plight. Often the period following an unsuccessful

war is one of anxious stocktaking. But though the British soldier had learnt one most important lesson from the American backwoodsman – the supreme value of musketry – his condition was miserable and his organisation chaotic. Pitt, like other eminent financiers, viewed the fighting forces with distaste; they were a necessary evil, on whom as little money as possible should be spent. Every war was an improvisation; sufficient recruits had to be caught or cajoled and somehow trained by an altogether insufficient cadre of officers and N.C.O.s. Our standing army was as usual by far the smallest in Europe, but it was not, as in 1914, a machine incomparably equipped and splendidly exercised. On the contrary, it was in many respects the worst in Europe. Only low and desperate characters were as a rule likely to be attracted by the terms of service. Enlistment was for life, pay was miserable, and discipline maintained by fear and torture. Training was made difficult by the splitting up of regiments into small detachments lodged in ale-houses and taverns, since barracks were judged an unnecessary expense. Uniformity was impossible, as there was as yet no recognised drill book, and the colonel of each regiment regarded his men as his own private preserve. There was no co-ordination at the top, no Commander-in-Chief, and no undivided civilian responsibility.

It is no wonder that the majority of officers in the pre-revolutionary period did not take their

profession seriously. They were concerned rather to get on than to do their duty. There were two ways of getting on, not mutually exclusive — influence and money.

For the first six years of his military life Wellesley seems to have shared the ordinary outlook. During that period he exchanged into seven regiments, with such success that before the close of 1793 he had become a colonel. It is not known how much, if any, regimental duty he performed with the first five of these. As he had little money his rapid promotion was due rather to influence than to purchase. He was aide-de-camp to the Lord-Lieutenant and a member of the Irish House of Commons as soon as he came of age. The shy youth was developing into a handsome and fashionable man of the world, much to the joy of his chilly mother, who began to exert herself heartily on his behalf.

Still, it was not in Wellesley to be idle, and we have it on his own authority that he formed during these years the regular habit of private reading, which helped his mind towards the perfect concentration, poise, and clearness of its maturity. Doubtless also his intensely practical eye took in far more of military detail than was apparent to the casual observer. Yet, when all has been said, there is no evidence that Wellesley was singled out by the common voice of his contemporaries for the highest place, like Sir John Moore of his own generation, or, a more recent example,

Douglas Haig – that model and aspiring officer, whom his instructor at Sandhurst already designated as a future Commander-in-Chief.

Wellesley's first experience of active service was singularly unfortunate. In later life he never spoke of it, except to remark that he had learnt how things ought not to be done.

In February 1793, Great Britain declared war on revolutionary France, which had opened the Scheldt in defiance of treaties and was invading Holland. Pitt was a man of immovable steadfastness and courage, but he neither understood strategy nor the nature of the war. This was no limited contest against the House of Bourbon to pick up a colony or to gain a selfish object, but a tremendous struggle against the incarnation of militant nationalism, to oppose which all western and central Europe was clumsily arrayed.

Part of our minute army was at once shipped to the West Indies, leaving only a few thousand men for Flanders. Here we acted in nominal co-operation with the Austrians, but each army in effect pursued purely selfish ends. The Austrians were intent upon taking the French frontier fortresses in order to include them within their own Belgian frontier. The British aimed at the capture of Dunkirk, which they intended to retain until the expenses of the war had been paid. The campaign of 1793 was a failure, but disaster was reserved for the next year. Wellesley, who had now obtained command of the 33rd Regiment of

Foot, crossed in March 1794. The enemy was now showing a furious ardour of offence. In June the Austrians were overthrown at Fleurus, beyond the Sambre. Far on their right the British were driven through western Belgium into Antwerp, and joined hands with the Dutch. But the great port proved no continuing city of refuge. The winter was consumed in a most miserable retreat through Holland. No element of demoralisation was absent. Without mutual confidence from top to bottom an army on active service is no more than a mob. Here was a Commander, the Duke of York, of utter incompetence, though, curiously enough, later on he proved an excellent organiser at the Horse Guards ; here were idle, selfish subordinates, always at headquarters and never with the troops. Many of the regimental officers had received commissions, not because of their military competence, but because they had raised a quota of recruits. These recruits were an astounding scum of paupers, half-wits, and jail-birds. "Many of them," wrote a horrified staff officer, "do not know one end of a firelock from another, and will never know it." Transport, supply, and medical services were all of an unprecedented vileness. Finally the weather played its terrible part. The winter set in early and was of extreme rigour. It was then that the French cavalry performed the unique exploit of galloping over the ice to capture the Dutch fleet at the Texel.

The retreating army crept north-east, constantly pursued and harassed by a hostile population, till it reached safety at the Ems. Only 6,000 out of 30,000 are said to have survived. The Duke received this report : " Your army is destroyed ; the officers, their carriages, and a large train are safe, but the men are destroyed." To Wellesley had been entrusted the honourable and arduous task of commanding the rearguard, a force of three regiments. He at least practised here on a small scale what he afterwards declared to be the secret of his success. " I was always on the spot – I saw everything and did everything myself."

But he clearly as yet had no definite conviction that his destiny lay with the army, for a few months after his return to Ireland he was soliciting the Lord-Lieutenant for a civil appointment. " It is certainly a departure from the line that I prefer, but I see the manner in which the military offices are filled." One might have thought that a lieutenant-colonel of twenty-five had little cause for complaint. Wellesley however always coveted something beyond the mere routine of soldiering. He desired an independent situation, in which his powers of administration of finance and of diplomacy should have a free scope.

He was to find all these within a year, as a consequence of an order to take his regiment to India.

CHAPTER II

THE INDIAN DECADE

Importance of India in Wellesley's career – his brother Richard Governor-General – conquest of Tipu Sahib – Government of Mysore – First Mahratta War – battle of Assaye – return to England.

INDIA made Wellesley. It gave him far more than a reputation and a share in glory. It enabled him to find himself. He did not merely grow with his responsibilities, like all men of worth, but he fitted himself for almost any responsibility. This may seem an extravagant claim. But no one can read his Indian despatches without finding in them the passion for justice and truth, the patience, the realism, the grasp of principle through exact knowledge of detail, which forged him into the unequalled public servant of a great imperial Power. Wellesley was often harsh and cold in his dealings with individuals ; he was always full of consideration for the prejudices and difficulties of alien peoples. Stiff in manner, he was versatile in mind, and always abounding in practical expedients. He learnt how to combine the statesman with the soldier more perfectly than any other Englishman. For, if we allow that Marlborough was a more inspired general and a more winning diplomatist, he lacked

Wellesley's faithfulness, simplicity, and common-sense moderation.

He was indeed fortunate in his opportunity. Two years elapsed, during which his only military exploit was the share in an abortive expedition against the Spanish colony of Manila. Meanwhile he was carefully studying both his own profession and the condition of India.¹ In May 1798 arrived the great promoter of his fortune, his eldest brother Richard, Lord Mornington, appointed Governor-General. This flamboyant and magnificent proconsul curiously resembled his twentieth-century successor, Lord Curzon. Both had a vein of pettiness and sensitiveness in the granite of their hard public service. Both in the flower of their age embarked eagerly upon a forward policy to resound not less to their own glory than to that of their country.

Mornington at once called in his brother as an intimate and unofficial adviser on high policy. There was plenty of room for anxiety. Though India was still uneasily at peace, French propaganda was actively engaged in shaking the foundations of British security. Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt was sending a thrill of intense expectation through the East. In the south of the Peninsula a fire was ready to be kindled. West of Madras the warrior Sultan of Mysore, Tipu Sahib, like his father an inveterate raider of the

¹ Mr. Guedalla has given a most interesting and lively analysis of Wellesley's library, contrasting it aptly with that taken out by Napoleon to Egypt in 1798. *The Duke*, pp. 55-64.

Carnatic, was building up a large army with European organisation and officers. He was feeling his way towards a coalition. To isolate him before his preparations were complete, and to strike him down, seemed the course both of boldness and prudence. His northern neighbour, the Nizam, took the English road and furnished a contingent. The war began early in 1799. Wellesley had his first experiment in organising an army for the field, and he already showed the master touch. He was appointed to command the Nizam's force, strengthened by his own 33rd Regiment, which joined the Company's army in invading Mysore from the west. It was, in Wellesley's words, a truly "ponderous machine"; 35,000 fighting men dragged at their tail 150,000 followers, 120,000 bullocks, and masses of other beasts of burden. Yet this great mixed multitude sat down with little difficulty to besiege Tipu's fortified lair, his capital of Seringapatam. Wellesley here suffered a minor reverse through failing to seize an outlying post by night with his own regiment. It is the only incident in his whole career in which he displayed even a momentary loss of nerve. Seringapatam was carried by assault on May 4th. Tipu was killed at the breach, and this nest of plunderers was furiously and systematically looted. General Harris, the Commander-in-Chief, appointed Wellesley to be governor of the fortress. This selection gave great offence to his senior, Baird, a hard-bitten,

headlong veteran, who had spent several years as a captive in its dungeons, on whose temperament his mother threw a flood of light by her famous exclamation : " I pity the chiel wha's chained to ma Davie."

This was the kind of post which Wellesley had always desired ; it combined both military and civilian problems, and demanded tact, initiative, and the display of independent judgment. In his own words, it " afforded the opportunities for distinction and then opened the road to fame." For more than six years Wellesley remained in the control of the diminished area of the partitioned province, allowed to survive under British protection. He exterminated the organised brigandage commanded by a champion freebooter, Dundia Wao, self-styled " king of the world." He was disappointed in the hope of commanding an expedition to Egypt, and was thus drawn into the first of prolonged quarrels with his brother. But in 1803 he undertook a project sufficient to satisfy even his tireless spirit of consuming activity – the first Mahratta War.

This loose-knit confederacy of restless conquerors brooded like a great cloud of power over the north. The solvent of jealousy was however hard at work among the five paramount lords. Mornington and Wellesley hoped peacefully to draw their sting by insinuating British influence into their divisions. It was the Governor-General's council which pushed for war. And it

is doubtless true that the British raj could not be firmly established in India until these warriors had been overthrown by force. The opportunity was favourable, for the division among the Mahrattas was acute, and in Wellesley the Company possessed a peerless organiser of victory.

The Mahrattas promptly pushed their divisions to the extremity of civil war ; their nominal suzerain the Peishwa, having lost his capital, Poona, appealed to the British against his aggressor Holkar. The former was received by treaty into British protection, and the British, allied as before with the Nizam, were fighting for the next eighteen months against most of the Mahratta chieftains. The details of the war need not concern us. Wellesley was not responsible for the whole campaign, for Lake won independently several important victories far to the north. But history has rightly fixed upon Assaye as marking, like Plassey, a decisive stage in the long progress of British conquest.

Wellesley's army this time was not encumbered by the vast circus of men and beasts which had impeded the road to Seringapatam. Every detail had been thought out by its commander to ensure the utmost mobility which was consistent with the adequate provision of supplies. Thus he reckoned that he would fight only on ground of his own choosing, since the movements of the enemy would be conditioned by their necessity of living on the country. Yet he was in fact compelled to accept

battle at the utmost disadvantage, being forced, in his own words, to "a most desperate attack." He actually showed greater tactical hardihood and daring in his first pitched battle than in the scores which he was to deliver on European fields.

On September 23rd imperfect and inaccurate intelligence brought him with a divided force within six miles of the whole power of Scindia. Seven thousand five hundred weary men, who had just marched twenty-four miles, faced fifty thousand with an eightfold superiority in guns. Wellesley held it impossible to retreat upon his own division twelve miles back, since the enemy was vastly superior in cavalry and would have harried his little force to death. He therefore resolved immediately to attack an enemy who, besides this numerical superiority, had his front and left rear protected by two deep rivers. He took extraordinary liberties of manœuvre. First he marched his men four miles to their right flank to cross by a ford, the existence of which had been not ascertained but merely deduced by the fact that two villages faced one another on opposite banks. Having thus crossed, he confidently expected to be able to strike the Mahrattas' flank, and thus bring to nought their whole order of battle. But to his astonishment the enemy had formed a new line oblique to the old within the angle of the two rivers. Even his numerous batteries faced the new alignment.

Wellesley was therefore faced with the most

forlorn hope – a frontal assault against this great hostile mass. The clash was exceedingly bitter and prolonged, but the little band, of whom less than half were British, finally routed the Mahrattas, and captured nearly all their guns. Nineteen hundred of the victors were killed or wounded.

Assaye was an astonishing victory, one of the most famous illustrations of the truth that there is almost nothing of which good troops are incapable if inspired with an absolute confidence in their commander. "The General," wrote Major Colin Campbell, the mutiny hero of more than half a century later, "was in the thick of the action the whole time, and had a horse killed under him. No man could have shown a better example to his troops than he did. I never saw a man so cool and collected as he was the whole time." These words might have been written of every one of Wellesley's battles from Assaye to Waterloo. His ubiquitous calmness and confidence on the field are justly proverbial. The Mahrattas were overthrown, the great keys of their confederacy, Poona, Delhi, and Agra, passed into British control, and Wellesley came back for the last time to his government at Mysore. His brother returned home in 1804, and he followed early in the next year.

He returned at thirty-six a major-general of two years' standing and a Knight of the Bath – a special distinction in those days, when the

number was restricted to a mere two dozen. Though prize-money had given him a small fortune, the directors of the Company, who disliked the imperious Wellesleys, had ungratefully bestowed upon him no single mark of distinction. He was now in all essentials the great and majestic figure of later years, needing and seeking those wider paths of duty which were to make his name a familiar one throughout Europe. In two respects only his character was yet susceptible of important change. He had not yet secured that indomitable patience which later marked every deed, though not every word, of his military life. On the other hand, he had not yet shed an affability, almost a sprightliness of manner, which was replaced in the Peninsula by a bleak and grim aloofness towards his subordinates, seldom broken down. This reserve was not however extended to women. He had an unpleasing reputation for the persistent pursuit of pleasure without passion, prolonged until late in life.

CHAPTER III

VARIOUS EMPLOYMENTS

Meeting with Nelson – connection with Pitt – expedition to Hanover – marriage and entry into Parliament – Chief Secretary for Ireland – expedition to Copenhagen – first expedition to Portugal – Vimeiro and Convention of Cintra – appointment as Commander-in-Chief in the Peninsula.

WELLESLEY reached England in September 1805. The whole of Europe was at the pitch of anxious expectation, for the armies of Napoleon were converging on southern Germany to assail Austria and Russia, the Continental protagonists of the newly formed Third Coalition. England herself was freed from the threat of invasion, with Trafalgar a mere month in the future. By a singular chance the waiting-room of the Colonial Office provided a casual meeting between the rising soldier and the supreme sailor, about to make his last journey to Portsmouth. Wellesley's account well deserves its frequent quotation, for it is characteristic and shrewd. "I found . . . a gentleman, whom, from his likeness to his pictures and the loss of an arm, I immediately recognised as Lord Nelson. He could not know who I was, but he entered at once into conversation with me, if I can call it conversation, for it was almost all on his side and all about himself, and in really a style so vain and so silly as to surprise and almost

disgust me. I suppose something that I happened to say may have made him guess that I was *somebody*, and he went out of the room for a moment, I have no doubt to ask the office-keeper who I was, for when he came back he was altogether a different man, both in manner and matter. All that I had thought a charlatan style had vanished, and he talked of the state of this country, and of the aspect and probability of affairs on the Continent with a good sense, and a knowledge of subjects at home and abroad that surprised me . . . in fact, he talked like an officer and a statesman. The Secretary of State kept us long waiting, and certainly for the last half or three-quarters of an hour, I don't know that I ever had a conversation that interested me more. Now if the Secretary of State had been punctual and admitted Lord Nelson in the first quarter of an hour, I should have had the same impression of a light and trivial character that other people have had."

Wellesley was at this time busy in re-establishing political contacts, rather, it appears, to uphold the assailed reputation of his unpopular brother than for his own advancement. In particular he reached some intimacy with Pitt during the last months of his life, and was consulted by the Prime Minister on questions of strategy. With piercing insight the latter described him as one who "states every difficulty before he undertakes any service, but none after he has undertaken it." December found him in command of a brigade

on the bleak Hanoverian shore near Bremen, engaged in another of those abortive expeditions which so curiously beset his earlier career. For the news of Austerlitz made imperative an immediate reshipment to England. There he resumed the comfortable humdrum duties of a brigadier at Hastings.

In this year (1806) he entered both the marriage state and Parliament. His bride was the daughter of Lord Longford, Lady Kitty Pakenham, with whom he had entered upon some vague understanding before his departure to India. It is said that he had forgotten all about the lady on his return – certainly he wrote her no letters from the East – when some officious gossip rallied him upon his supposed inconstancy. The marriage was dictated on his part rather by honour than love. Its result was not happy. The pretty, affectionate, and rather vapid lady could not live up to the formidable husband ; she bored him, and he was frigid and unfaithful ; he intimidated her, and she was awkwardly nervous. As Wellington was also in later life on the worst terms with his eldest son, his family life does him small credit.

His return for the rotten borough of Rye in April is said to have been motivated by the determination to defend the honour of his eldest brother, now threatened with impeachment. If so, it was not long before he cherished wider ambitions, for within a year he was installed as

Chief Secretary at Dublin Castle. The incorruptible and sardonic soldier was curiously placed in this notorious nest of wheedling intrigue and every kind of jobbery. It was a lucrative post, worth £6,500 per annum, or twice as much as he drew at the height of his fame when commanding-in-chief in the Peninsula. There was plenty of routine work to exercise his activity. In fact, it was an attractive second string, but always, as he constantly told Ministers, very definitely second. He preferred military employment, but he could wait. In the next two campaigns in which he was engaged the two strings were, so to speak, knotted together, for with the easy pluralism of those days he retained the Secretaryship while on service. The former of these brought neither honour nor pride to England. Napoleon by a secret article of the Treaty of Tilsit (June 1807) projected with the acquiescence of Russia to close the Baltic against us by seizing the Danish fleet. This would have dealt a heavy blow at British trade, and would have deprived the navy of vital supplies. As Napoleon also had similar designs against the navies of Spain and Portugal, success would have given him control of the whole coast from Denmark to Naples and a superiority in ships of the line, and would have re-established a formidable threat of invasion.

The terms of the treaty were swiftly conveyed to the British Government by a channel so secret that its source is still uncertain. The reply to this

deadly menace was peremptory and high-handed beyond precedent in our history. Necessity overrode the obligations of international law towards a weak neutral, placed, as Canning said, "in a balance of opposing dangers." It was demanded that the Danish fleet should be delivered over into British custody, to be returned only at the conclusion of a general peace. On July 29th a great force sailed, twenty-seven ships of the line and 20,000 troops, of which Wellesley commanded a division. It was hoped that this armament, combined with 7,000 Germans from Stralsund, might induce the brave Danes to bow before the inevitable. They chose the road of hopeless honour, and their raw levies turned out to defend Copenhagen. The city capitulated on September 5th, Wellesley being one of the British Commissioners. He received the thanks both of generals and prominent citizens for his kindness and consideration during the campaign.

He returned to his desk at Dublin Castle for the next eight months, during which Napoleon was weaving that odious web of trickery and violence within the Peninsula which was to give the British general his grand opportunity. In the autumn of 1807 the Emperor, with the compliance of the contemptible Spanish Court, invaded Portugal. The ragged remnants of Junot's army reached Lisbon just in time to see the Government and the fleet disappearing down the Tagus. Spain was by now swarming with the French. Next spring,

by a series of low stratagems, they seized the principal key fortresses of the north. Napoleon then enticed the King and Crown Prince over the border to Bayonne. These two revolting creatures had hoped through Napoleon's favour to exploit their mutual quarrels, fomented for his own purposes by Godoy, the Queen's paramour. They were quickly disillusioned, for Napoleon kidnapped them both, and stowed them away in confinement in France. Declaring the Bourbons to have ceased to reign, he set up his brother Joseph, an agreeable and well-meaning puppet, as King. Madrid was in his hands, well garrisoned by Murat, and he anticipated no serious trouble. His mistake was fatal, for, in his own words, "it was the Spanish ulcer which destroyed me." For the next six years the French troops in the Peninsula never fell below 200,000, and frequently exceeded 300,000. The whole country blazed into spontaneous insurrection ; in each province the local junta organised its own terrible guerrilla bands. The French armies were cut off from each other and possessed no more than the ground upon which they actually stood.

The Junta of the Asturias, in the north-west, appealed to Great Britain for aid. Canning was ready in response, remembering the prophecy of his master Pitt that Napoleon would be overthrown by a national war, which would have its origin in Spain. No large force was immediately available, but in June 1808 Wellesley was directed

to take command of a small expedition of about 10,000 men. He had long been preparing himself for an independent command against the French. The diarist Croker found him musing at the office on the eve of his departure and, on enquiring the cause, received this most instructive reply : " Why, to say the truth, I am thinking of the French I am going to fight. I have not seen them since the campaign in Flanders, when they were capital soldiers, and a dozen years of victory under Buonaparte must have made them better still. They have besides it seems a new system of strategy, which has outmanœuvred and overwhelmed all the armies of Europe. 'Tis enough to make one thoughtful : but no matter : my die is cast : they may overwhelm me, but I don't think they will out-manœuvre me. First, because I am not afraid of them, as everyone else seems to be ; and secondly, because if what I hear of their system of manœuvres be true, I think it a false one as against steady troops. I suspect all the Continental armies were more than half beaten before the battle was begun. I, at least, will not be frightened beforehand."

It was already Wellesley's belief that the Tagus and the Lisbon peninsula offered the securest theatre for operations based on a fleet. Thither accordingly he directed his transports, but finding the capital occupied by Junot in force he disembarked a hundred miles farther north, in Mondego Bay. Here he was reinforced by 5,000

men from England, and with great difficulty raised transport from the depleted countryside. From the very first he kept rigidly to the system of paying for everything in cash, instead of requisitioning – the practice of the French, and indeed of all Continental armies. Thus he gained the immediate goodwill of the Portuguese peasantry, a most valuable and lasting asset.

Wellesley pushed boldly south towards Lisbon, influenced by an under-estimate of the enemy and perhaps by the news of his own impending supersession. For the Horse Guards could not bring themselves to flout the sacred principle of seniority by continuing so newly fledged a lieutenant-general in command of an expedition which was to be augmented to 30,000 men.

Twice he collided with the French, who sought to bar his progress on the coast road – at Roliça and Vimeiro. By modern standards these combats are scarcely more than skirmishes. Yet the latter in particular is typical of all Peninsular fighting. For the French attacked in heavy columns against an enemy in line so concealed that neither his main position nor his flanks could be correctly ascertained. Junot indeed was so hard hit that Wellesley made instant plans for cutting him off from Lisbon and capturing his army. Now however occurred one of the most curious comedies in British military history. The command of the army changed thrice in twenty-four hours. The elderly Sir Harry Burrard had himself

to give way to a still more impressive veteran, Sir Hew Dalrymple, who had last seen active service in a subordinate capacity fourteen years before. These cautious seniors had both agreed in stopping any advance. Junot, however, in fear of a popular rising, offered the immediate evacuation of Portugal. Thus the famous Convention of Cintra was signed, by which the French were returned to their country in British ships. Wellesley himself signed on behalf of the army, not as approving the actual terms, but as realising the benefits which the evacuation would confer upon the Allied cause. He returned to England to resume for the last time the secretarial duties, carrying with him a present of plate from his late subordinates, together with their assurance that "we have but one sentiment . . . admiration of your talents and confidence in your abilities."

This, however, was far from the feeling at home, where public opinion, which had condoned many disgraceful reverses, broke into fury at this qualified success. Wellesley was peculiarly assailed both as signatory and as member of a family so acquisitive and unpopular. But he was fully vindicated by a court of enquiry held that winter.

Meanwhile the cause of the Spanish insurgents had suffered eclipse. Napoleon for the only time in his career descended upon Spain with a great army (November 1808), overthrew his enemies, and occupied Madrid. Sir John Moore, who had

been entrusted with the command of the British expedition and was trying to act in concert with the Spaniards, darted from Salamanca against the French communications with Bayonne on the news that Madrid had fallen. Drawing against himself an overwhelming concentration, he saved his army by the cruel winter march to Coruña. This diversion had prevented the invader from overrunning the south, yet by the spring of 1809 northern and central Spain, together with Oporto, were strongly occupied by the French. The British strength in the Peninsula was reduced to 10,000 men at Lisbon.

The Cabinet did not lose heart. In spite of the King's reluctance, a new expedition was prepared, of which Wellesley received the command (April 2nd, 1809). Thus began an uninterrupted and arduous campaign of five years and the acquisition of great glory.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEFENCE OF PORTUGAL

Plans for the defence – the Allied resistance favoured by geography – the passage of the Douro and Soult's retreat – the Talavera campaign – Masséna in command – Bussaco – the invasion of Portugal – arrested before Torres Vedras – misery and retreat of the French army – campaign of 1811 – Fuentes d'Onoro – Albuera – prospects for 1812.

WELLESLEY, as we have seen, had pondered over the problem of how to defeat the French in the field of battle. He was now faced with a far wider and more complicated question : the defence of the Peninsula against an almost triumphant and vastly superior enemy. He was cast for the many overlapping parts of strategist, administrator, statesman, diplomat, and economist.

The means at his disposal were small. Until 1812 he could not count upon more than 30,000 British soldiers. And even this modest force was, after Walcheren, the only real army in the field, the remainder of our forces being dispersed in detachments to guard our wide-flung interests all over the world. If then this army was ruinously defeated or captured no new one could supply its place. The Peninsula must be given up, and Napoleon's European supremacy permanently established. It was therefore necessary to pursue a cautious policy from a base offering security of

communications and withdrawal to a maritime Power. Could Portugal afford such a place even if Spain were conquered? Wellesley, differing from Moore, told Ministers in a famous memorandum of astonishing prescience that in his opinion it could. Although the country, in his own words, "is all frontier," it is easy of defence. It is practically all mountainous, and the natural lines of approach from Spain, the rivers Tagus and Douro, pass into Portugal through roadless and barren defiles. The routes of invasion are therefore very limited, and defended by fortresses : Badajoz on the south, Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida on the north. If then the British army was kept up to a minimum strength of 30,000, and the Portuguese forces properly organised, it would take at least 100,000 French to conquer Portugal. But if so large a force were diverted, insurrection would spring up again all over the vast extent of Spain. For it must be remembered that Spain is as large as France, while its people were masters of an implacable irregular warfare. They retained the old provincial spirit and power of local organisation. The loss of their capital meant little to so decentralised a people. While Paris was the heart of France, Madrid was a remote and unimportant capital.

Moreover geography singularly favoured defence. As the British were masters of the sea, all French communications had to run by land. The great barrier of the Pyrenees forbade traffic

save at its two extremities, so that for more than 300 miles in the centre of the range the French armies possessed no carriage roads. All supplies and reinforcements must converge on Madrid through Navarre and Catalonia. Spain itself is cut up by successive lines of river and mountain running east and west and presenting barrier after barrier to an enemy descending from the north. All conquest had therefore to be piecemeal; the armed peasants isolated each army from news of another and made mutual succour of extreme tardiness and difficulty. Finally Napoleon made any concerted or timely action by his lieutenants almost impossible by the singular obstinacy with which he continued until 1813 to direct all the operations. Orders from Paris took several weeks, from Vienna or Moscow several months, to arrive, and were on arrival completely out of date. The unfortunate Joseph wrangled with the Marshals, who often treated him with open contempt, and, wrangling with each other, pursued in their own districts their own immediate interests.

Wellesley's immediate object on arriving at Lisbon was to organise the Portuguese and drive Soult out of northern Portugal, where he occupied the line of the Douro and the great city of Oporto.

The former task had already been taken in hand by Marshal Beresford, the illegitimate son of a great Irish house. British officers had been induced to take service with the Portuguese by the

offer of a step in rank, and held a proportion of the higher posts in every regiment. British drill was introduced, and the Portuguese were gradually welded into a very fine fighting force, so that in 1813 Wellington himself called them "the fighting-cocks of the army." Beresford was an overbearing and quarrelsome man with no tactical genius – the frightful bloodshed at Albuera, his one independent battle, was principally due to his faulty and reckless dispositions – but he was a powerful and energetic organiser. Without the Portuguese the French would never have been driven out of the Peninsula.

Of the characteristics of the British it will be more appropriate to speak at the close, for that invincible army of which its commander said in 1814 that "it could go anywhere and do anything" was mainly his own creation. In 1809 the French had no high opinion of it. The two enemies had not met in any great land battle. The British had been completely defeated in three Flemish campaigns (1793, 1794, and 1799). Against this they could set only three minor victories : Alexandria, Maida, and Vimeiro. It was long indeed before the Marshals in Spain treated their adversary with any proper respect.

Such a contempt was the main cause of Soult's disaster that very spring. On May 12th the two commanders faced one another across the broad stream of the Douro, running swiftly in a deep ravine opposite Oporto. There was no bridge,

and Soult had drawn all the boats into the northern shore. Confident that his enemy could not cross in view of a considerable army, he kept a miserable look-out. A barber who had rowed over to the British bank on the preceding night pointed out three unguarded barges on the farther side. They were towed across, and a considerable body took possession of a commanding seminary on the northern bank before the alarm was given. It was then too late, for another British detachment had crossed below the city and was menacing the unorganised enemy. Soult made a headlong retreat through the northern mountains, flinging away all his guns and transport. In ten days of extreme hardship he lost 6,000 men.

Thus Portugal was cleared, and Wellesley for the first and only time in the Peninsula engaged on an ambitious offensive which relied upon the close co-operation of the Spanish armies. Basing his hopes on the difficulty of concentrating the various French armies, he threatened Madrid by an advance up the Tagus valley in conjunction with Cuesta, an aged, infirm, spiteful, and obstinate general. Meanwhile another Spaniard, Venegas, was supposed to strike at the capital from the south-west. The whole scheme woefully miscarried. Venegas was disobedient and dilatory, Cuesta bitterly jealous of the Englishman. Joseph assembled a sufficient army to block their path at Talavera. This bloody and furious battle

was a tactical victory for the British (the Spaniards took hardly any part in it), but instant retreat became imperative. Ney and Soult were pressing upon Wellesley's rear from the north, and blocked the right bank of the Tagus. He had to cross the stream, and finally made his way back to the Portuguese frontier behind Badajoz. "I have fished in many troubled waters, but Spanish troubled waters I will never fish in again!" His complaint was not merely of the Spanish generals and their ragged, unreliable armies, but of the civil authorities and population. During the whole campaign his men had been more than half starved. Wellesley set this down to deliberate ill-will, but it was rather due to a combination of real scarcity with an incompetent supply system. The men naturally hated the Spaniards; these and many other grudges were paid off by the ferocious cruelty shown towards the inhabitants in the sack of Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz, and San Sebastian in the later years. There was indeed a general spirit of despondency in the army that autumn. A chaplain wrote: "There is certainly a general wish that we may be ordered to England, and nine out of ten officers would hail a peace between France and Austria provided it led to that event." According to D'Urban, Wellesley was almost the only man who did not share it. "His admirable firmness proves him a hero, if he had done nothing else to deserve the name."

On balance the year had favoured the Allied

cause. Portugal for the time was free ; the concentration of 100,000 Frenchmen on the Tagus had relit the fires of revolt in the north-west. Talavera, an undeniable if fruitless victory, had brought Wellesley a peerage and the famous name of Wellington.

In those days, at least in Spain, where roads were vile and rains torrential, the winters were spent in quarters. There were festivities in Lisbon, where many officers brought their wives. The higher ranks tried every expedient to get home to England – much to Wellington's annoyance, for he did not believe that leave and active service were compatible. He at least never left the Peninsula for a day. The winter brought no slackening in his activity. He rode about constantly inspecting troops and defences, for that iron frame seemed never to be tired or indisposed. Yet "The Peer," as he was familiarly known in the army, had his relaxations. He hunted regularly with a scratch pack of hounds, individuals of which were sometimes sent back by the French if they trespassed into their territory. The usefulness of his staff for this purpose was not overlooked. "I shall want Waters for the earth-stopping business, if not for that of the Adjutant-General." It was noticed that officers liked to approach him on hunting mornings, as he was so anxious to be off that he would accede more readily to their requests.

In 1810 his measures for the defence of Portugal

were to be put to the supreme test. Napoleon had defeated Austria and forced her to peace in the previous autumn. By his marriage with a daughter of the Imperial House he had yoked that country to his triumphal car. Except in the Peninsula there was a sullen peace on the Continent. He could therefore afford to send large reinforcements of his best troops thither. There was not indeed a general concentration against the British, for Soult descended into Andalusia and overran that fertile southern province. This dissipation was all to the good, for Cadiz, reinforced by a British detachment, remained untaken and permanently detained a large besieging force. But the cleverest of the Marshals, Masséna, was placed in the independent command of a fine army of nearly 70,000 to drive the British into the sea.

As it was expected, the French began to knock on the northern door of Portugal, for an invasion of the south would not have given them Lisbon, across the broad intervening arm of the Tagus. It was of high importance for Wellington that the invasion should not start until the summer was far spent, when his preparations would be complete and the harvest gathered.

To delay the enemy he relied upon the efficiency of his outposts and the defence of the frontier fortresses. Craufurd, the erratic and sulky genius who commanded the famous Light Division, splendidly fulfilled his watching part.

Not a French patrol for three months got through his guard. His system was so perfect that, in Sir Charles Oman's words, "the web of communication quivered at the lightest touch." Ciudad Rodrigo fought a good fight. Wellington, with that cold-blooded calculation of risks so much more appropriate to scientific war than any gesture of chivalry, refused all motion of succour in answer to the appeals of the brave Spanish commander, though the guns could be heard and the flashes seen from the British lines. Almeida, its counterpart within the Portuguese territory, unfortunately blew up when the bombardment had scarcely begun.

By the middle of September, Masséna started in good earnest. Though Wellington was fully prepared to give ground almost to the gates of Lisbon, he had some hopes of arresting his enemy by a fortunate battle. Moreover he thought it well for the morale of the Portuguese that they should strike a blow before abandoning most of their territory. Accordingly he stood on the ridge of Bussaco, a long flat-topped heathery down, about the height of Dartmoor, and offered battle. Masséna had evidently no great opinion of British troops, still less of the Portuguese, for he sent his men staggering up the long hill, a climb of at least an hour, to a frontal assault. Wellington, as was his invariable habit, concealed his men behind the crest; the French columns were shaken by close volleys and then sent rolling down

the slope again by a bayonet charge. This was a disastrous day for the French, who lost nearly four to one – 4,500 against 1,250. It did not stop Masséna. But Wellington had laid his plans to ensure that the Marshal would neither capture the army nor Lisbon nor stay long in Portugal.

Strict orders had been given that the country should be devastated before the French, all provisions which could not be removed were to be destroyed, and the population evacuated. Moreover by an old ordinance all able-bodied men were called up to serve as irregulars. These bands did Masséna much harm, and actually captured all his wounded and stores at Coimbra a few days after he left. Not unnaturally he shot those whom he caught. Finally Wellington had drawn across the mountains of the Lisbon peninsula his three famous lines of Torres Vedras. The first two were more or less one system a few miles apart ; the third simply covered the harbour of embarkation, where transports remained in readiness.

Thus Masséna was faced on a small scale by a flankless barrier such as baffled all the great commanders a century later. Every hill had been turned into a sheer cliff on its eastward side, every valley and track blocked with abattis ; streams had been dammed to form inundations. On every height were forts and guns. Masséna was baulked. He could not even attack the lines, whose existence had been a profound surprise ; he sat down in front of them. He was growing old by

the standards of those days – fifty-two – and confessed that he was weary of the rigours of campaigning, even though mitigated by the presence of a mistress. But he had a stout heart, and keyed up his men to feats of endurance which Wellington had judged incredible. The Portuguese peasants had not indeed swept the country as bare as Wellington wished. A good deal of food had been buried and was discovered.

Yet even so it was only by the most heroic misery that the French remained more or less in touch from October until the beginning of March 1811. A month later the army crept back over the frontier, leaving trails of dead and stragglers. It had lost about 25,000 men, famine and disease having proved far more deadly than the weapons of war.

Wellington's calm confidence and refusal to risk his army had been triumphantly justified. This crisis was the only time when the home Government wavered in his support, for, contrary to the assertions so recklessly made by partisans, it stood by him manfully. But during this winter Liverpool, the Secretary for War, wrote more than once to hint that the army should be withdrawn, though leaving all responsibility for a decision with its commander.

The campaign of 1811 consists mainly of the marking of time by a smaller army skilfully handled against the threat of converging forces. Wellington is neither wholly defending nor

attacking. Any notable success on his part always brought the jealous Marshals out of their lairs. Soult had issued unwillingly from Andalusia, where he played the congenial rôle of a plundering viceroy, to besiege and take Badajoz on the Guadiana. To meet that threat Wellington had to send part of his army south under Beresford. While he himself blockaded Almeida with a weakened force, Masséna fell upon him at Fuentes d'Onoro (May 5th). This is the weakest of Wellington's defensive battles, for, contrary to custom, he left his right unprotected. Masséna drove it in, and, but for Craufurd's brilliant handling of imperturbable infantry retreating in squares over several miles of open ground, might have destroyed it with his vastly superior cavalry. The battle is generally described as a British victory, since Masséna was foiled and Almeida fell, but, as Wellington wrote in a private letter, "If Boney had been there, we should have been beat." This was the last of Masséna, whom Wellington always reckoned as his ablest antagonist. He was recalled in favour of the young, handsome, ambitious Marmont, Duke of Ragusa.

Now the interest shifted to the south. Soult returned to Andalusia after leaving a strong garrison in Badajoz, but was soon forced to come up again against the mixed army of British, Spanish, and Portuguese which was besieging it under Beresford's command. Both generals made a sad muddle of their dispositions on the field of

Albuera (May 16th), with the natural result that in "the soldiers' battle" which ensued the loss of brave men was enormous. Both sides lost 7,000-8,000 men, or a quarter of their number; of the British contingent alone half had fallen. That night the exhausted combatants bivouacked on either side of a brook, so close that British prisoners recognised their comrades by the light of the camp fires.

Wellington endeavoured to improvise the siege of Badajoz in earnest. But that towering fortress on the Guadiana rock easily repelled the contemptible train directed against it. Most of his guns were museum pieces from the Portuguese fortresses, dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with balls that did not fit the barrels, so affected by windage that they often bounced harmlessly off the castle walls. Long before a breach was effected Marmont came to join Soult, and Portugal faced its last threat of invasion. It was however no more than a threat, for the Marshals were not anxious to attempt another desperate campaign. Thus the summer passed with no serious engagement. Wellington covered the frontier, but had secured Almeida only of the three keys without which defence was never secure or offence possible; and offence had begun to revolve in Wellington's mind, for the European situation was changing to Napoleon's disadvantage. He was obviously set upon war with Russia. It was likely therefore that the

quality and quantity of the French Peninsular armies would diminish. New heart and new opportunities would be given to the everlasting Spanish resistance, and something great might be accomplished in 1812.

CHAPTER V

THE DEFEAT OF THE FRENCH

Capture of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz – invasion of Spain – Salamanca – entry into Madrid – check at Burgos – retreat and indiscipline of army – campaign of 1813 – Vitoria – Soult and the battles of the Pyrenees – invasion of France – occupation of Bordeaux and Toulouse – peace.

ON JANUARY 1ST, 1812, the dead season of winter, Wellington, having received a siege train from England, swooped upon Ciudad Rodrigo. The place was strong but the garrison very insufficient. The trenches were pushed remorselessly forward in frost and rain. The men, each of whom it was said "carried an iced pair of breeches with him," were relieved every twenty-four hours. On the 19th, two breaches having been made, the fortress was stormed. A thousand men was no excessive price for this triumph of speed, though the brave Craufurd was among them. His dying interview with Wellington aptly illustrates the latter's almost inhuman dislike of sentiment. Craufurd whispered a request to his commander to forgive the intrigue which he had formerly carried on against him. Wellington, in relating the incident, said, "Poor Craufurd talked in the way one has read of in romances!"

After Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz. By the middle of March, Wellington was before the great fortress,

and by April 6th it had fallen into his hands. Yet in the fruitless assault of the great breach the British lost as many as in their most famous victories – 5,000 men. Fire and water, lead and steel, stones and masonry, were all instruments of their destruction. Only Picton's feint of escalade against the castle was successful, the 3rd Division mounting upon twenty-foot ladders. The British bugle-calls from within announced victory when failure elsewhere was definite. The soldiers who had rioted at Rodrigo delivered themselves over to a three days' saturnalia of murder, lust, and plunder. A young British officer rescued a Spanish girl, married her, took her as his comrade in all his campaigning, and finally immortalised her name in the Natal township of Ladysmith. It is noteworthy that this horrible fury was directed solely against the Spaniards, the French garrison being treated as the comrades of war.

Wellington had achieved this double success by the excellent system of commissariat and transport which he had tirelessly organised. "He won Spain," says Fortescue, "by solving the problem of how to feed the troops." Soult and Marmont with 80,000 men allowed him to seize these vital places "under their beards," to use a contemporary French expression, because their men were dispersed over wide areas to find a precarious sustenance.

The stage was now set for the main campaign.

Wellington intended to strike at Marmont. In order therefore to make communication between him and Soult as difficult as possible, he directed Hill, his lieutenant in the south, to destroy the fortified bridges of boats at Almaraz on the Tagus. Hill, the model subordinate and most beloved of commanders, performed this task with despatch (May 19th). So the communications between the two French corps were thrust back a hundred miles up the river to Toledo.

The early months of the summer after the British had occupied Salamanca were consumed by the most complicated manœuvres without the issue of battle. Marmont was a very subtle player on the chessboard of moving tactics, and won many preliminary moves against the Englishman. The swift outflanking marches by which he forced the British back from the Douro to Salamanca were long remembered. Marmont himself has stated that in all his experience of war no military pageant equalled the spectacle of the two armies – nearly 100,000 men in all – moving parallel to each other along the hot dusty plain within easy cannon-shot for two days' march.

Marmont however, as Wellington truly said, was better at manœuvring than at bringing his men together into line of battle. On July 22nd he gave a chance to his adversary, who made the most sudden and brilliant use of it. On that day Wellington deployed his army in battle array south of Salamanca, expecting, if Marmont

continued to outflank his right, to be compelled to retire along the Ciudad Rodrigo road. Marmont, anticipating such a retreat, made a false move by so extending his left as to leave the leading division isolated. "By God, that will do," said Wellington, as he fixed his glasses upon the French while munching a chicken-leg in a farm-yard. He galloped to his brother-in-law, Pakenham, commanding the 3rd Division. "Ned, do you see those fellows on the hill? At them and drive them to the devil." The open flank of the French was shattered and their centre pierced. Marmont was wounded at the very crisis of the battle. The French were routed and lost 14,000 against 5,000. Wellington had fought his tactical masterpiece in his first offensive battle against European troops. "Forty thousand men," ran the popular saying, "were beaten in forty minutes." Decision followed observation with lightning swiftness, and one of the beaten generals, Foy, admitted that this victory had raised the reputation of his adversary to that of Frederick the Great. The broken army retreated northward along the great road of their communications with France to Burgos.

Wellington turned eastward and drove the unhappy Joseph from the capital. Wellington's entry into Madrid was truly triumphal. The women showered bouquets, and kissed his hand and even his stirrups as he rode by.

Leaving Hill with a strong garrison, and relying

also on a joint landing of British and Spaniards in Catalonia to keep Joseph quiet, Wellington turned north-west against the army of Portugal which was hovering on his communications. Here he sustained the most serious check of his career, being arrested by the fruitless siege of the petty castle at Burgos. He afterwards attributed his failure to two causes : first, the indifferent quality of his troops, for though he had enough men he had left the best with Hill ; secondly, lack of transport, particularly in mules, to bring up guns and ammunition. He actually attempted to breach the walls with three heavy guns.

Towards the end of October a great military coalition was converging on Burgos and Madrid. The army of Portugal was in good heart again and in posture of attack. Soult had at last left Andalusia to join Joseph in threatening Madrid. The British were in great jeopardy. However Hill joined Wellington, and back went the united army wearily through Salamanca and Ciudad Rodrigo into cantonments on the frontier. The men were overworked, dispirited, and angry, rain fell incessantly, and for seven days they hardly received a ration. In the pursuit without any considerable action at least 4,000 stragglers were lost. Wellington, venting no doubt his own bitter disappointment—for he had hoped to winter on the Ebro—infuriated his officers by a harsh general order which absurdly minimised the great hardships of the retreat. He attributed

the falling off in discipline, which he declared was greater than that of any army with which he had ever served or of which he had ever read, to "the habitual inattention of the officers of regiments to their duty."

Nevertheless the event was to prove that the French armies had been struck beyond remedy in personnel, armament, and morale. Twenty thousand prisoners had been taken and three thousand guns, together with the great arsenal of Madrid. The country south of the Tagus had been finally cleared. Wellington had now been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Spanish armies, which had almost invariably been beaten in the field. To ensure that it should be more than a mark of empty distinction, such as the Cortes had lavished upon him already, he journeyed to Cadiz, where this sovereign legislative body was in session. He was determined in particular to have a control over the appointment and dismissal of officers. This was promised but imperfectly fulfilled during the coming campaign. He returned with his dislike of popular assemblies intensified, though according to his wont he seldom allowed his impatience or contempt to be made manifest. If he had to work with people, he never failed to get on with them. Where he failed in later life was in working with those whom he considered himself entitled to command. This weakness was to be plainly shown when he became Prime Minister.

Early in May 1813, having waited for the springing grass to provide fodder for his horses, Wellington moved out of cantonments, waving his hat as he crossed the frontier brook with the words, "Farewell, Portugal! I shall never see you again." Within six weeks he brought the French to decisive battle and sent them flying headlong into the Pyrenees. His manœuvres during this period are as brilliant strategically as was his handling of Salamanca tactically. They exemplified the truth of the old soldiers' saw, "Sweat saves blood."

The French could neither stand nor stay on any of the great rivers running athwart the invader's path, for Wellington continually outflanked their right by crossing over the western reaches. Douro, Tormes, Esla, Pisuerga, Carrion, and finally Ebro were overpassed. Joseph, the nominal commander of the only army left in Spain – except Suchet's little force in Catalonia – was being inexorably driven into the extreme north-west morsel of his fading kingdom. Wellington by a rare stroke of foresight was actually shortening his communications as he traversed Spain, for the navy was supplying him with a new base at Santander.

Finally, on June 21st, the hunted turned to bay in the basin of Vitoria, under the Pyrenean foothills, where the Royal Road takes its last stage to Bayonne. Badly placed within a blunt loop of the many-bridged Zadorra, the French fought with less than their usual spirit. Nor did Wellington

secure the annihilation of his enemy, which his battle plan envisaged. Cut off from retreat by the Royal Road, the defeated army was forced to fly east to Pamplona. It got away in the wildest confusion, losing few prisoners but all its 152 guns, baggage, and treasure. This treasure was indeed the great hindrance to pursuit, for the Allies fell upon it so heartily that out of a million pounds Wellington could recover barely £30,000. The indiscipline of the last year's retreat was still rampant, and a month after the battle 8,000 men were still absent from the colours.

Still, as a prisoner caustically remarked to Wellington, "You, my lord, at least have an army, while we are a travelling brothel." For the French host had been encumbered with all the vast sweepings of evacuation, both in plunder and women.

This victory echoed loudly through Europe to the advantage of the Allied cause. Napoleon, after returning empty from Moscow, had recreated by the spring another great army, and, after defeating the Russians and Prussians twice in May, arranged an armistice in Saxony. The news of Vitoria put fresh heart into the dispirited eastern monarchs; the Czar celebrated it with the unprecedented honour of a *Te Deum*, reserved till then for Russian triumphs. It hardened the heart of Metternich, who by subtle stages was drawing Austria from an armed neutrality towards her fifth war with Napoleon. These great

diplomatic repercussions were indeed more important than the purely military sequel. For though the French practically evacuated Spain except for the two stubborn fortresses of San Sebastian and Pamplona, they found depots and supplies in abundance behind the Pyrenees, and were very soon to give Wellington great trouble and alarm under a new commander. Soult had been despatched post haste from Germany as the Emperor's lieutenant, while Joseph was relegated to private life with signal marks of indignity which Soult gleefully administered.

Soult during the next eight months was invariably foiled or beaten. Yet his reputation as a commander increased with that campaign, for he did wonders with the forces at his command.

Wellington had his army dangerously strung out, for he was conducting the siege of San Sebastian and Pamplona, fifty miles apart, at the same time, and had to cover both the blockading forces and the communications between them. His generals, as he complained (though it was partly his own fault), were lions in his presence and children in his absence. Soult forced both the passes of Maya and Roncevalles, and brought his army on to the heights of Sorauren overlooking Pamplona. In the course of the confused and terrible battles which ensued, the famous incident occurred when the two commanders watched one another from their eyries across a narrow valley. Wellington asserted that Soult's gestures gave him

valuable hints as to the movements of the French and helped him to parry them. In the issue Soult was thrown back beyond the mountains with a loss of 15,000 men.

San Sebastian fell in September, having cost much blood. Its storm is interesting in that the idea of an artillery barrage, so scientifically exploited a hundred years later, had its birth in the brain of Graham, who commanded the besiegers. He ordered the massed batteries to fire a few feet over the heads of the baffled storming party at the French barricade. The device was entirely successful. The city was ruthlessly sacked, and a bitter correspondence ensued with the Cortes, who alleged that it had been deliberately destroyed to rid British traders of a troublesome rival.

Space would fail to tell the full story of the winter forcing of all those fortified river lines which barred the south-west door into France : Bidassoa, Nivelle, Nive, and Adour. Soult's difficulty, as Wellington himself acknowledged, was that he could not be strong everywhere, for he was outnumbered by at least three to two. Moreover, the renewal of the war in central Europe, which was Wellington's opportunity, brought such disasters to French arms that the troops began to realise that it was a forlorn hope to fight for the Empire. Wellington relates that a French officer captured after the news of Leipzig, when warmed with wine and food, said pathetically to his host,

“ Monseigneur, il n’y a ni quartier-général ni l’armée française ; l’affaire est finie.” There were other symptoms as well ; three battalions of Germans, obeying the secret orders of the Duke of Nassau, marched into the British lines.

The invasion of France was now in train, and Wellington feared far less the opposition of Soult than a national rising. To avoid this danger he forbade requisitioning and paid cash to the French peasants as he had done in the Peninsula. He even remedied the extreme lack of specie by employing professional coiners from the army to mint silver pieces. And, above all, finding that the Spaniards were naturally inclined to repay their own cruel wrongs by pillage and murder, he left them all except one corps on their own side of the frontier : a noble act of self-denial, never perhaps paralleled in a conquering general. He was indeed rather embarrassed by the enthusiasm of the country folk for the House of Bourbon, partly genuine, partly fomented by the intrigues of the Duc d’Angoulême, who had attached himself to the army. Wellington restrained his activities with stern rebuke, for he knew that the Allies were still negotiating with Napoleon at Châtillon. He warned the Mayor of Bordeaux, after Beresford had occupied that great royalist city, that the white cockade would be worn at their own peril, and not by his order, as Angoulême had falsely asserted.

Meanwhile Soult retreated continually north-east through the pleasant foothills into the basin of the Garonne, where he hoped to join with Suchet, who had evacuated Catalonia by the coastal road. Within Toulouse he stood in posture of defence. The city was no regular fortress but was encircled on all sides but the east with water. On the south flowed the rapid Garonne, swollen with the spring snows, while Louis XIV's great canal of Languedoc ran round the west and north. The northern front was moreover screened by a line of hills beyond the canal. The stubborn battle for its possession on April 10th was a waste of brave blood, for peace had been signed a week before. No courier however had yet traversed the 450 miles from Paris. Wellington obviously thought that Soult had little bite in him, since the Marshal had just before neglected a famous opportunity of falling upon a British detachment isolated for two days upon the north bank of the Garonne.

He made a great sprawling attack, which fulfilled its purpose in that Soult marched off east next day. But there is little to admire in the tactics of the day, while Wellington lost 4,500 against 2,000.

The last mutter of war was yet to come, when the Governor of Bayonne, apparently in a fit of rage at unconfirmed news of Napoleon's abdication, heavily punished the British in a sortie and captured their commander, Sir John Hope.

This most famous army was speedily disbanded, since the veterans were needed for our war with America. Wellington with his tireless public spirit accepted the Embassy at Paris. He first had a short triumphant holiday in England, which he had left a commoner and to which he returned as a duke. Seated at the bar of the House, which he last entered as a Minister, he received the stately thanks of the Speaker on behalf of the Commons of England, together with a grant of £400,000. Unlike Marlborough, it was recognised that he had put aside all spirit of party for service in the field, and he was acclaimed also without distinction of party.

CHAPTER VI

WELLINGTON AND HIS ARMY

Comparison between Wellington and Marlborough – Wellington on the British soldiers – harshness of his discipline – Wellington's insensitiveness – his characteristics as a general – his excellence and limitations.

WELLINGTON is essentially the man of the Peninsula, as is also Marlborough of the Low Countries. Both were consistently successful over the flower of the French army at the very pitch of its fame. But while Wellington fought against the most famous of Napoleon's Marshals, Marlborough had to deal with the mediocre successors of Condé and Turenne. Yet the largeness, subtlety, and deftness of Marlborough's combinations lead one to believe that he had a greater military mind than his successor. Marlborough excelled in the rapier flash of attack, while Wellington was our greatest master in the science of defence. While both were instruments of a Coalition directed by Great Britain, Marlborough had to bear the supreme burdens of the whole Grand Alliance, a vaster though perhaps not a more difficult task than the co-ordination of all the jarring elements within the Peninsula. Both therefore played great parts as well on the diplomatic as the military stage. Wellington had none of that charm and fascinating grace for which

Marlborough was famous. He won his points by determination, by patiently returning time after time to the charge, and by an extraordinary exactitude of knowledge.

Both were incomparable trainers and organisers of an army, though William III left an instrument in better condition than that which Wellington received on his arrival in Portugal. Both were noted disciplinarians, but Marlborough elicited a more willing and loving obedience than that which Wellington exacted through fear and respect. We hear of no such vile excesses in Flanders as have permanently sullied the fame of the Peninsular veterans. It was at least in part the brutality of Wellington's punishments which made the men brutal.

In Marlborough's mingled character there was much to love and much to condemn ; for the Iron Duke there was universal respect and hardly any love.

We have fortunately a great and varied mass of contemporary material to give us an exact picture of the chief and his army. Wellington's own despatches are both a mine of information and a revelation of character. There are hundreds of diaries and memoirs, written by officers and privates as well as by non-combatants like chaplains, doctors, and military lawyers. Three great historians have given full-length pictures – the fiery and eloquent Napier, most furious of partisans, himself an eminent actor in the scenes which

he narrates ; and in our own days Sir Charles Oman and Sir John Fortescue.

Everyone knows the harsh and sweeping judgment of Wellington that British soldiers were "the scum of the earth," and that they had all enlisted for drink. Moreover the code of discipline which he maintained was fully consistent with this belief. He upheld and even favoured the barbarous system of flogging, which not infrequently was equivalent to death through torture. Often too we find him urging the revision of court-martial sentences in the direction of increased severity. It is of course useless to say that Wellington was talking at random ; he was at least expressing part of the truth. The army was for long the common resort of "tough" characters ; even within living memory the member of a respectable family who had been enlisted would be considered almost as great a disgrace as a jail-bird.

Yet there is plenty of contemporary evidence that many officers and men thought the rigour of discipline degrading and brutalising, and that there were commanding officers who almost abolished the lash. Wellington's own most trusted lieutenant – "Daddy" Hill, as the men called him – was one of the kindest men imaginable, who when dying in extreme old age said, "I do not think I have an enemy in the world." He always got the utmost out of his troops because he "drew them with cords of a man." One might

suppose from Wellington's attitude towards punishment that he was a cruel man. But this is very far from the truth. He was not the least bloody-minded ; he did not exult in battle. We cannot conceive of him like Napoleon as he surveyed the carnage after Borodino – 80,000 dead and wounded – saying, “ C'est un beau champ de bataille ” ; or like Von Kluck stalking horribly over the corpses at Le Cateau to the disgust of his staff. On the contrary, both after Badajoz and Waterloo he broke down and wept.

He was most sparing of the lives of his men. He was determined that none should be killed except for a definite military advantage. No bickering of sentries or pickets was allowed. In fact he encouraged the extraordinary fraternisation between the two armies by which outposts were often arranged by mutual agreement and hostile pickets always warned to fall back before an attack. Prisoners on both sides were treated with a generous humanity with which the practice of a hundred years later contrasts most vilely. In fact, as between the two armies the war was conducted with the very maximum of chivalry which is consistent with waging it at all. It was only upon civilians that each side worked off its superfluity of lust and cruelty.

Wellington was really a great military headmaster of an extremely efficient but unsympathetic type. He was insensitive to the individual.

Everything was ruthlessly subordinated to what he held to be the common good. He did not try to adapt the machine so as to appeal to the men's better natures : on the contrary, it was regulated on the assumption that fear was a constant and necessary deterrent. To a large extent of course this is true of all armies, but Wellington carried it to an extreme. Similarly he was sometimes unjust to subordinate officers, not because he liked injustice, but because he thought it necessary thus to pass over the faults of superiors, whom he wished on public grounds to retain the confidence of the army.

He took immense pains to see that the men were well fed, well clothed, and seldom over-fatigued ; he never worried them about small details which he thought irrelevant to their efficiency. He was far removed from the fussy and pedantic martinet so wearisomely conspicuous in our Great War. As a result he knew exactly what he could get out of his men. It was no vain boast when he said of his army at the end that " it could go anywhere and do anything." But he never attained to that intuitive knowledge of soldiers' characters and aspirations which is the secret of supreme commanders. In such psychological insight Cæsar and Napoleon were immeasurably his superiors. On the other hand, on the actual field of battle he is among the greatest. No man was ever more implicitly trusted by all ranks. " In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." No man ever

won a battle more absolutely by precept and example than he won Waterloo.

It is a singular fact that, although the French are an extremely brave and military nation, they have been exceedingly unfortunate in their contests with the English. They count unnumbered triumphs over other countries, but they wear few laurels of victory won from us. It is not that they are less brave ; it is rather that the contrast between the two types of national bravery has always proved disconcerting to them but not to us. Their *élan*, vivacity, and impetuosity in attack have filled the English soldier with confidence, even amusement, rather than dismay ; whereas the imperturbable and rock-like solidity of the Englishman in defence has, as many French writers admit, afflicted their soldiers with profound uneasiness and signs of wavering long before the opponents came within contact or even volleying distance. Wellington gave back to his soldiers that belief in personal ascendancy which they had temporarily lost in the revolutionary wars. His success of course cannot be ascribed merely to this ; it was largely, when all is said, a question of generalship.

In the first place he could bring his men more speedily to any given place because of the tireless attention which he paid to supply and transport. This superiority in power of concentration added to his numbers at any given moment, as did also his most remarkable eye for country. This indeed

is the essence of all his tactics ; and, as everyone knows, he confessed in later days that he had spent all his life guessing what was on the other side of the hill. Most of the country over which he fought is rough, broken ground intersected with ridges and ravines, behind which a line of battle could be screened, with its flanks protected by some similar obstacle. It was thus very difficult for an enemy to see where his strength lay, or to turn it even with superiority of numbers. As moreover in those days high-angled howitzer fire was almost unknown, it was difficult to punish the unseen line with a scourge of cannon to prepare the attack, Napoleon's main device. Only at Talavera, where the British centre was perforce stationed in featureless country to link up with the right and the Spaniards, did the preliminary bombardment cause severe losses. Only at Fuentes d'Onoro was a flank ever exposed by a piece of misjudgment never satisfactorily explained.

In a defensive battle then we must imagine a double line of men either standing, kneeling, or lying down, mainly invisible, waiting to be attacked, generally uphill. A mile or less away dense French columns would be forming up for the assault. In the mid-space light troops would be bickering with one another supported by cannon. The French since the Revolution had highly developed the art of skirmishing with *tirailleurs*, as they were called, whose duty it was to work as

close as possible to the hostile line, shoot holes in its ranks, divert its fire, and generally make it as unsteady as possible before the assaulting columns drew near. Wellington countered this move by his use of riflemen and by training other picked battalions as light troops. Against him therefore the French *tirailleurs* had little of the preliminary success to which they were accustomed against Continental troops.

Now comes the moment, so many times repeated, when the column advances to attack the line. This dense formation was originally the necessary result of the vast national armies of the French Revolution. The individual was of little account; he could be easily replaced by the *levée en masse*. It was truly said of those battles, "Where the French lose a man the Austrians lose a soldier." Half-trained conscripts, unable to manœuvre and unhandy with their muskets but burning with patriotic fire, fought almost invincibly shoulder to shoulder, driving through their enemies by sheer weight of mass. This formation was inherited by Napoleon, who prepared the way for it by his terrible massed batteries, who supported it by cavalry, who often modified it by alternating the column with the deployed line, but who nevertheless retained it as the main thunderbolt of his offensive stroke.

Now against a steady line this formation had two defects which time after time rolled it back in confusion and slaughter before the British.

Firstly it could use but a very small proportion of its musket power against the enemy as it advanced. Normally at least three men out of four could not fire, and sometimes a much larger fraction even than this. On the other hand, the deployed line would command the uninterrupted use of every musket, and would of course so much overlap the column as to be able to blast not only its head but both its flanks. As the fire was reserved until a very close distance – “until you can see the whites of their eyes” – and burst out simultaneously as a volley, its destructiveness can be imagined.

This account so far suggests that Wellington was essentially a defensive general and an infantry general. Within limits this verdict which has so often been given is true. Putting aside Assaye, he fought only one offensive battle of pure manœuvre, Salamanca, and here he was able to make his sudden thrust just because he had himself been standing defensively with his flank thoroughly protected. Vitoria, and still more the passage of the French rivers, are carefully thought-out and reconnoitred attacks with superior numbers upon the weak points of a prepared or fortified position. To say this is not to detract from their excellence, but merely to point out that Wellington has no claim to be counted among the great masters of the rapid move on the chessboard of the open battlefield.

Similarly, it is true that he was not, like

Napoleon, famed for his power of implacable pursuit. Partly no doubt this is due to the necessity of husbanding his slender resources against risk, to which his mind was always returning ; partly also to the incompetence of his cavalry commander, who was not his choice but imposed by the Horse Guards. But his temperament had not the abandon and ecstasy of the typical pursuer like Murat. In fact he had the defects of his qualities, like almost every human being ; but his qualities were far more valuable to the Allied cause than his defects were harmful. One gambler's throw and the British army and the Peninsula might have been lost without remedy within a few hours. Thoroughness eliminates risk : this is the conclusion above all others that we gain from his despatches. Here are some typical sentences : " No power on earth shall induce me to take a step that I do not approve of." In commenting on the inefficiency of some of his generals he writes, " Success can only be obtained by attention to the most minute details " ; of another general : " If he will discontinue his attentions to universals and confine them to his particular duty I shall employ him " ; and yet again, " The statement of a fact is very different and has an effect more powerful than a general reflection." It has been well said that Wellington represents, better than any other character in history, the perfection of common sense.

CHAPTER VII

DIPLOMAT AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

Ambassador at Paris – plenipotentiary at Vienna – the return of Napoleon – commanding in the Netherlands – character of his army – relations with the Prussians – the Allies surprised by Napoleon – Quatre Bras and Ligny – Waterloo – Wellington's share in the victory.

WELLINGTON was now to appear in the limelight, which in spite of his dislike was to follow him all the rest of his life. Until now his deeds had been famous but not his person, and Fortescue aptly reminds us that an English paper seeking to caricature him in 1814 could not do better than the image of a bulldog with his name on the collar.

It may seem odd and tactless of the British Cabinet to have sent as ambassador to the French the victorious general who was fresh from invading their territory. But they desired to take advantage of his powerful prestige, so much greater than that of any professional diplomat, and they were fully justified. It must be remembered that France, by a convenient fiction, partly believed abroad, was supposed to have given a national welcome to the restored Bourbons. Really, in Napoleon's descriptive words, "They let them come as they let me go." Moreover, motivated by the assumption that the French had been forced

into conquest by the insatiable ambition of their Emperor, the peace was perhaps the most generous ever given to a powerful foe who had been beaten to his knees. The extent of French territory after the Peace of Paris was actually somewhat greater than before the original outbreak of war in 1792. Finally the British Cabinet was particularly well disposed towards the new régime, as Louis XVIII, dissimulating his reluctance, had accepted a constitution more or less on the model of our own.

While however purely French matters had been settled before Wellington arrived, there was still a mass of thorny questions of the highest importance awaiting decision when the Congress met at Vienna that autumn. The Allies had already gained the consent of the French in a secret article to the effect that all such matters would be settled in principle by the four great Allies before they were discussed at the Congress. But it was perfectly certain that there would be acute conflicts of opinion between the four which might lead to the gravest complications. Hence the British Government, which desired no territory on the Continent, was anxious to come to an understanding with the French, who, it was hoped, would prove equally disinterested. Wellington's mission therefore was to make that subtlest of diplomatists, Talleyrand, see reason in the English light. In that case, he assured the Foreign Minister, there was no reason why England and

France working together should not be "the arbiters of the Congress."

From September onwards the centre of interest shifted to Vienna, where Castlereagh, the chief British delegate, was nobly striving to create a lasting settlement on the lines of appeasement and mutual concession. Wellington had little of importance to do at Paris beyond routine work and social duties. There was some talk of sending him to command the British forces in America, where the unhappy war dragged on, but on the last day of 1814 a peace was arranged at Ghent. In any event, as he himself recognised, it would have been exceedingly unwise to spirit him away from Europe until the new settlement had been made and given time to work. Ministers however were anxious to remove him from Paris, where it was feared that he might fall to the weapon of some fanatical assassin. The opportunity came in January 1815, when Castlereagh returned to England to manage the Opposition, who, as the Premier complained in many querulous letters, were getting dangerously restive. Wellington went to Vienna, to that glittering throng of all the monarchs and potentates of Europe, who concluded every day's work with round after round of magnificent festivity. The European situation had now greatly improved. Only a month before, there had been the gravest danger of a great war breaking out between the nominal Allies over the division of the spoil.

Now however the Czar had relinquished his major ambition in Poland, and the King of Prussia had surlily contented himself with devouring only half of Saxony. The "balance of power in Europe" – as usual the prime aim of British diplomacy – had been re-established. Wellington's task was concerned rather with details than with principles. A spirit of grasping conciliation was gaining ground in the Congress.

Suddenly the whole iridescent bubble of European gaiety was pricked. On March 7th the news arrived of Napoleon's escape from Elba. Wellington's immediate comment shows how little he understood the temper of the French. "It is my opinion that Buonaparte has acted upon false or no information, and that the King [Louis XVIII] will destroy him without difficulty and in a short time." Napoleon went straight for Paris, his little band of Prætorians being swelled on the journey by all the troops sent to bar his passage. Though flickers of civil war gleamed in the south and west, he was obviously the undisputed ruler of France.

It was true that he had not been the first to break the Treaty of Fontainebleau by which he accepted the sovereignty of Elba, for Louis XVIII with mean folly had never paid him the guaranteed allowance of £80,000. It was also true that he maintained a nominally constitutional government in France, and was profuse in his pacific assurances to the Powers. But the

assembled Allies would have none of him. By proclamation they denounced him as "the disturber of the peace of the world" and delivered him over "to public justice."¹ Moreover they passed rapidly from words to action, making a military treaty on March 25th between each other and Louis XVIII by which was set into slow motion the ponderous machine of their tremendous armies.

The position was singular, for they were officially allied with France, still assumed to be *de jure* under the rule of Louis; they were at war only with Napoleon and his adherents. This equivocation proved, as we shall see, no small embarrassment to Wellington and Blücher during the preliminary stages of their campaign in the Low Countries. Here in this vital outwork of British security, where we have fought seven separate campaigns in 350 years, it was certain that the first blast of the storm would fall. Hither Wellington repaired. He had been offered the presidency of an Allied war council, but replied with characteristic understatement that he would "prefer to shoulder a musket."

He had inspected the defences of the newly created kingdom in 1814 (for Belgium had been united with Holland under a Dutch sovereign);

¹ The words in French are "*à la vindicte publique*," which were commonly translated in English "public vengeance." They were interpreted as being an incitement to Napoleon's assassination, and Wellington was bitterly reproached by the Opposition for having set his signature to them. Such however was not the intention, nor do the words properly bear such meaning.

and a considerable Dutch force was still mobilised, largely to restrain the profound discontent of the Belgians. As however a good proportion of it was composed of Belgian conscripts its military value was doubtful. Moreover most of the Peninsular veterans had not yet returned from America, so that the large majority of British troops available had never fired a shot in action. Probably the most experienced of the whole composite army were the Hanoverians. Altogether he commanded about 100,000 men, whom he described in sweeping terms as "an infamous army." But as in the same breath he described as "very inexperienced" a staff which, as Fortescue shows, was almost entirely of his own choosing from tried subordinates, he was probably speaking in a fit of ill-humour rather than expressing his considered opinion. It is inconceivable that he would have stood the supreme hazard of Waterloo with a force of which he had so low an opinion. In any case he took the utmost trouble to leaven every division but one with British troops, who formed a bare third of the whole.

His immediate duty, together with Blücher, who commanded 120,000 Prussians based at Liège, was to watch the whole Belgian frontier lest Napoleon should by one of his shattering strokes seize that country before the great Allied hosts, 600,000 or 700,000 strong, could converge upon the Rhine.

This was the Emperor's very intention. By almost incredible efforts he had raised a fighting force of 200,000 men in two months. Nearly two-thirds of these were destined for the irruption into Belgium. His plans were matured in the strictest secrecy, and he was helped by the ambiguous position of the Allies towards France, "a state of neither war nor peace," which prevented Wellington from being the first to cross the frontier even with patrols.

Now, as the Allies were spun out more or less along the whole frontier, supported by the fortress cordon, it is obvious that Napoleon could strike at either of their outer flanks, or at the point of junction at the centre. As his whole strategy consisted in dealing with either adversary separately, he naturally rejected the two former alternatives, since a defeat of either Wellington or Blücher must drive the defeated army towards the other. If on the other hand he separated them by a rent at the point of contact, they must, as he believed, fall widely asunder upon their respective communications, Wellington to Antwerp, Blücher to Liége and the Rhine. Thus Brussels and most of Belgium would be within his grip. Such a triumphant first act would surely overthrow the British Cabinet, and set in power an Opposition which by a very natural mistake he thought ready to forsake the Coalition and give him most favourable terms.

Napoleon's brain had not lost its cunning for

swift and strategical combinations. Having carefully disseminated falsehoods, and closed the frontier against the percolation of the truth, he suddenly appeared with his whole army of 120,000 before the Sambre (June 15th), drove back the Prussian outposts, and was ready next day to deal his disruptive blow. Thus dramatically began this headlong campaign of four days, in the course of which at least 80,000 men were killed and wounded.

Though the Allied generals had expected to be attacked, Napoleon had caught them napping. Either army was still spread out over a front of at least forty miles. Moreover, though Wellington and Blücher completely confided in each other's loyal straightforwardness, there appears, as is usual among allies, to have been considerable distrust and jealousy between the two staffs. Gneisenau in particular, Blücher's chief of staff, was always suspicious that Wellington would try to dictate to the Prussians and play them a bad turn. So it came about that no news was sent to Brussels of the crossing of the Sambre, or that the main Prussian army was retiring eastwards. Wellington seems to have had no definite information until late that evening ; nor was it until he was supping at the Duchess of Richmond's famous ball that the alarming tidings arrived of the appearance of French cavalry before Quatre Bras, an important crossroads twenty miles south of Brussels. He might well exclaim, "Buonaparte has

humbugged me, by God ; he has gained twenty-four hours' march upon me." As dawn was dimly breaking, the officers slipped from their dancing to ride back to their scattered quarters and set their men marching south.

It was not due to Wellington that Quatre Bras was put in a state of comparative security that night, but to a Dutch general otherwise unknown to fame—Constant de Rebecque, who on his own authority increased the tenuous garrison. So June 16th broke to find British and Prussians still in touch, but placed in imminent danger of losing it. Had Napoleon displayed the volcanic energy of his earlier years there is little doubt that this day would have been one of great disaster for the Allies. Even as it was, the French gained further advantage, though disappointing and indecisive in effect. From the moment that strategy began to be merged into tactics the Duke showed himself more than a match for the Emperor.

Napoleon's excellent plan was to deal with the detachments at Quatre Bras, fling them away north-west, and then rout Blücher, who was standing at Ligny, a few miles east, by a frontal and flank attack. He marred the execution by serious errors. The early hours were wasted, so that Wellington had time to put in successive detachments as they came up to the crossroads, while the position yet held. Moreover orders to Ney, who was in charge on the left, were ambiguous ; and Napoleon interfered fatally with his

discretion during the struggle. Hence was seen the curious spectacle—sufficient, as Wellington said, to ruin the reputation of any other commander—of a whole corps of 23,000 men marching and countermarching between two contiguous battles without firing a shot in either.

Meanwhile Blücher, relying on Wellington's promises of help if not attacked himself, had drawn up his men in dense visible array on the incline of a gentle slope rising from the Ligny brook. "Damnably mauled these fellows will be," Wellington prophesied, when on riding over to see them he noticed their terrible exposure to artillery fire. So they were, in spite of their stout resistance and appreciable superiority in numbers. Blücher was ridden down and left for dead. By nightfall they were in full retreat.

All might yet have been well for Napoleon had the two Allies proceeded to act as he had formed a picture of their intentions. But, unlike most coalitions, their military leaders had the common cause truly at heart ; they refused to jeopardise it by clinging to the immediate selfish object of securing their own divergent communications. Therefore they both retired in the same northerly direction, Wellington towards Brussels, and Blücher on Wavre, only thirteen miles eastward.

The Prussian staff-work however throughout this campaign was incompetent, a strange contrast with its splendid efficiency in all later wars, and Wellington was not informed of the defeat at

Ligny until the morning of 17th. Ney was fortunately in no position to take advantage of the isolation of the enemy before him. Wellington slipped his infantry quietly back before midday, much to his relief: "Well, there is the last of them gone, and I don't care now."

Meanwhile a great thundercloud had been rolling up the sky from the northward. As it reached the British position the sun still shone upon the woods near Quatre Bras. At this moment the French cavalry appeared in long lines, their weapons and accoutrements glittering in the bright light. Then the storm broke and the floods descended. Through the torrents and soaking rye-lands a brisk pursuit was staged for several miles. It was "like a steeplechase," said a French eye-witness, while the comment of the commander of the British cavalry, Lord Uxbridge, was: "The prettiest field-day of cavalry and horse artillery I ever saw."

However there was much noise and little damage. By nightfall the army was drawn up on the ridge of Mont St. Jean, on either side of the great road leading to Brussels, ten miles away through the Forest of Soignies. This position had been noted by Wellington as suitable for defence when he toured the Netherlands the previous year, and here he was determined to stand. The camp-fires gleaming through the sodden night gave Napoleon the welcome news that his adversary was not creeping away under cover of

darkness. He did not know that by an agreement made with Blücher, for the execution of which orders had already been given, two Prussian corps were to start at daybreak to fall upon the French eastern flank.

Napoleon was very confident : " The chances are ninety to ten in our favour." Convinced that the Prussians were in disorderly retreat towards Liége, he had detached Grouchy with 30,000 men to contain them. He commanded 70,000 splendid troops, with 250 guns. Wellington's motley host was some 5,000 less, with a hundred fewer guns. He also had made an important detachment, for the trusty Hill was guarding his right flank at Hal, right outside the battle, thirteen miles away.

As commonly happens, the great summer tempest had taken long to rain itself out ; all through the night it had poured upon the open bivouacs. The 18th found it still rainy, with a heavy steamy atmosphere. As the event proved, Napoleon's only chance of victory would have been a very early start. This was impossible. The heavy Belgian ploughland was a mass of glutinous mud (our generation knows by bitter cost the qualities of that mud) and the Frenchmen had dispersed abroad during the night in search of food and shelter. But he was in no hurry. He knew nothing at first hand of the British soldier or of Wellington's tactical mastery in defence. " Je vous dis que Wellington est un mauvais général, que les Anglaises sont de

mauvaises troupes, et que ce sera l'affaire d'un déjeuner." Such was Napoleon's opinion, and he acted upon it. He simply prepared a crushing frontal blow. As Wellington wrote afterwards: "Napoleon did not manœuvre at all. He just moved forward in the old style, in columns, and was driven off in the old style." Waterloo must have indeed been an amazing spectacle. Within a bare stretch of land three miles long by one deep nearly 150,000 men were grappling furiously for nine hours. In spite of the smoke, which all agree was very dense, there were many moments when the sinister splendour of war was displayed in all its panoply. Wellington relied for defence upon three tactical features: the sunken road running parallel with the crest and just behind it, protected against cavalry by a thick-set hedge, and the fortified farms of Hougomont and La Haye Sainte, advance bastions of his right and left centre respectively. The two latter were intended to consume their assailants and to gall the flanks of columns advancing up the hill; the former was his main defensive obstacle. There is no need to describe all the familiar details of this most desperate day. Napoleon sought repeatedly to smash the British centre; he attacked with infantry, with infantry and cavalry combined, throughout the afternoon hours, until the panting horses could scarcely crawl round the thin but unbroken squares. Finally, as the sun was setting and the Prussians were gripping his right rear

beyond remedy, he launched the last majestic hope of France, the invincible Imperial Guard.

A few days before, in Brussels, the Duke, when questioned as to his chances, pointed to a redcoat strolling in the street and answered, "It all depends upon that article there." Of their conduct on the 18th he wrote, "I never knew British infantry behave so well." He was the unfailing inspirer of these young troops. For seventeen and a half hours on that day he was continuously in the saddle. He rode slowly to and fro on that tormented ridge, until at the close all but one of his personal staff had been killed or wounded. Many notes are still extant in his firm sloping hand, directing his commanders on small tactical points. He was seen controlling the fire of a battalion within twenty yards of the enemy, ordering the riflemen to drive off a threatening swarm of skirmishers, serenely encouraging the shot-raked squares to that hardest of ordeals, immovable patience. From him also came that last spark of decisive energy which sent the wearied line charging downhill and turned defeat into rout. "Right ahead, to be sure," were his final recorded words on the field as he raised himself in his stirrups and held his cocked hat high in the air - a signal for general advance.

Wellington would have never fought without the aid of the Prussians, formally agreed beforehand. It is therefore idle to speculate whether

he would have been defeated without their appearance, for they were an essential part of his dispositions. He has himself recorded in his despatch in the most handsome manner that "the successful result of this most arduous day" was due to their "cordial and timely assistance." As early as one o'clock Napoleon had to detach 11,000 men against them, and from 5 p.m. onwards he was fighting desperately to prevent their seizing Planchenoit, the key to his rear. Their losses show how fiercely they were engaged, for they left on the field one-fifth of their 40,000 combatants. Of 25,000 British, almost one in three fell, and Wellington's whole army was diminished by 15,000. The French losses admit of no exact estimate, for during the night the army dissolved under the pitiless pursuit of the Prussians, who had long and evil memories to avenge. Nine times they hounded their wretched enemy out of bivouac and scattered him far and wide over the countryside. The campaign was finished ; there remained a mere military parade. Wellington was awed at the character and extent of his victory. The struggle had been so tremendous and so protracted, the balance had been poised so evenly until its overwhelming weighting at the last hour. He regarded himself as a divine instrument. "The finger of providence was upon me," he wrote,¹ and with that blunt, impressive simplicity which

¹ Most characteristically, he desired many years afterwards that these words should be omitted from the letter which it was proposed to print.

so became him he told his familiar gossip, Creevey, next day in Brussels, "By God ! I don't think it would have been done if I had not been there." Thus, with a majestic completeness vouchsafed to few, the Duke ended his career of active service in the prime of life, at the age of forty-six, which would have been considered young for a mere divisional general in any of the great armies a hundred years later.

CHAPTER VIII

PARIS AND CAMBRAI

France and her conquerors – threats of partition – Wellington counsels moderation – Commander-in-Chief of the army of occupation – diplomatist and financier – the final settlement with France.

So THE ALLIES came again to Paris. Twice within fifteen months they had occupied that capital, which had not seen an invader since the Spaniard left it two hundred and fifteen years before. In 1814 there had been no ambiguity; they had come as simple conquerors after desperate struggles with all the armies of France. This time the position was more complicated. They were still more or less allied with Louis XVIII, who was trundling back from Ghent in their baggage-train. Moreover, they had met with no resistance; there had been no *levée en masse*, no sniping by irregulars. Wellington himself had no doubts. The French were not behind Napoleon. His own proclamation on crossing the frontier was clear: "We are not coming as your enemies but only against that enemy of the human race with whom I will make neither peace nor truce." The Chamber itself had been swift to disembarass itself of the defeated Emperor; he was fleeing to the west, soon to become the prisoner of Captain Maitland.

The Allies however were full of natural fury.

Were they never to be quit of this incorrigible country? Must a million men be for ever set in motion thither, as soon as they had returned to their own distant lands?

With the exception of the British, who were models of abstinence and discretion, their enormous hordes behaved with oppression and tyranny. Houssaye in 1815 has given a terrible list of their authenticated outrages. Had Wellington given the word, France would have been partitioned. Even the British Cabinet, voicing public opinion, desired a very severe punishment. Wellington, to his everlasting honour, gave a decisive voice for appeasement. His arguments were the more telling, for they were based not on visionary sentiment but on the most robust common sense. He pointed out that if they wanted Louis back, on which they had all unenthusiastically agreed, they must give him a reasonable chance. A dismembered France would be the hotbed of a renewed revolutionary plague, which would not be stayed within its own frontiers. Moreover to whom would they be compelled to allot the *dissecta membra* of this mutilated nation? Prussia no doubt would have her share, which she might possibly be able to defend. But all the rest would be States of the second, third, or fifth order – the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Bavaria, Baden, Savoy. All these even in doubtful combination would be but a drop in the bucket against a France however diminished. If

the Great Powers insisted upon such cessions by treaty, they would be obliged to maintain them by force of arms. They would be condemned to perpetual war-establishments. If they were not to sink through bankruptcy into revolution, England would have to continue their perpetual paymaster. This last argument, as may be supposed, came home powerfully to the business-like brain of Lord Liverpool. The British Cabinet finally took the path of moderation, to which indeed the Czar had already been inclining. France was saved from any serious diminution, though she lost the accretions of 1814. But she was to receive a severe lesson. An army of 150,000 men was to occupy the north and east, as a guarantee of internal order and of an indemnity of some £37,000,000. The great military alliance of the four Powers was maintained against her.

Wellington, as was inevitable, was put in charge of this thankless and onerous task. At this moment he was undoubtedly both the most powerful and the most respected subject in Europe, dealing with Emperors and Kings upon equal terms, impressing all by his simplicity, directness, and utter lack of self-seeking. At his headquarters in the gracious little city of Cambrai he ruled over his great army, whose cantonments stretched from the Channel to the Swiss border. Here he strictly inculcated forbearance and moderation towards the conquered population. His own troops were instructed to give an example. "We

are Englishmen, and pride ourselves upon our deportment, and that pride shall not be injured in my keeping." The officers complained that he would not even allow them to reserve seats in the theatre for their use. But he was far more than Commander-in-Chief. He was the main prop of the wobbling restored monarchy. It was on his advice that Louis reluctantly took into the Government the regicide Fouché, who had the whole police system of France within his subtle fingers. It was Wellington who screwed the King up to dismiss the ultra-royalist Chamber – "*la chambre introuvable*" – which was showing dangerous signs of tampering with the foundations of the Revolutionary settlement.

He still moved constantly in the high paths of European diplomacy, being consulted on all matters of importance by the Council of Ambassadors at Paris, which was trying to clean up all the ragged edges of the work accomplished at Vienna. In 1817, on the personal initiative of the Czar of Russia, he was paid a magnificent compliment, which consisted in putting upon him another piece of most laborious and complicated work.

The Powers had been quarrelling among themselves over their respective claims for reparations from France (a source, as we well know, of the most sordid and bitter passions). Accordingly the Duke was set at the head of the Commission, and it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that he settled

the business single-handed. He ruthlessly pricked inflated bubbles of figures (the Prussians in particular had put forward some very gross items), and negotiated with the House of Baring a loan which enabled the French to pay off the whole debt on easy terms by 1818. In this year was held the first of those congresses which Castlereagh had arranged should take place periodically under the ægis of the four great Allies. Its proceedings at Aix-la-Chapelle were harmonious. On the advice of Wellington, France, as a repentant and solvent sinner, was admitted into the European Concert. The army of occupation was withdrawn two years before the period fixed for its determination. The Duke by his own decisive weight had deprived himself of this great position, within the wide limits of which he exercised, as was truly said, far greater powers than many sovereigns. He was ready and willing to return to England as a private citizen, or to serve the King in any capacity in which he might be wanted.

His share in the appeasement of France, and thereby in the securing of European peace for a long generation, deserves most honourable remembrance. He was not diverted from his purpose by two attempts at his assassination, or by the inevitable ingratitude of a proud nation writhing under the sting of defeat. From Waterloo until the time of his death the Duke was a man of international peace, and constantly ensued it.

CHAPTER IX

CABINET AND PRIME MINISTER

Wellington enters the Cabinet – his reasons for so doing – unsuited for political leadership – services to the Liverpool Government – failure as Prime Minister – Catholic emancipation and its effect on the Tory Party – duel with Lord Winchilsea.

AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, Wellington on his return to England was not left as a private individual to cultivate the gardens of his newly acquired Berkshire palace of Strathfieldsaye. He was at once invited to join the Cabinet as Master-General of the Ordnance. So began again that long connection with domestic politics which ended only with his life. He had himself no desire to serve under a party banner. During his Peninsular career he confessed more than once that he was becoming less and less drawn by the strict ties of parliamentary allegiance. He regarded himself, in his own words, "as the retained servant of the Sovereign." Doubtless he would have consulted best for his own reputation had he accepted no office and contented himself with exercising a "cross bench" influence over any Government in great matters of policy on which he was consulted. This indeed was the position which he finally held in his last days, and it was a very impressive one. The false

and cynical Greville constantly records in his memoirs his admiration of the Duke's single-hearted and disinterested patriotism. But in his last decade he had become a unique national institution, and occupied accordingly his singular niche within the constitution. In 1818 things were different. He was still young, active, and in a sense ambitious. He would certainly have chafed under retirement even if tempered by an intermittent unofficial share in the national councils. As Burke so truly said, "Influence is not government." Nor is it probable that Ministers would have been at all easy to see him standing outside, yet capable at any moment of shaking or destroying their position by the pronouncement of an adverse opinion. Moreover his philosophy and outlook, as far as his own country was concerned, were strictly Tory, though he was far from being a strictly orthodox Tory politician. It was therefore very natural that he should join a Cabinet which was still in 1818 the embodiment in action of pure Eldonian Toryism. It is however reliably stated that he did so "with the greatest dislike," and only because he was assured that if he refused to join he would weaken the Ministry and become a rallying-point for the disaffected.

In fact his original motive is not unlike that which determined Kitchener in becoming Secretary for War in 1914, though the latter was making a far greater sacrifice at a much greater

age without any experience of home politics. We must remember that the widespread riots and distress of 1818 constituted to most minds of that generation a grave state of emergency not obscurely heralding civil war. There is every reason to think that Wellington conceived of himself as performing a plain patriotic duty, which it would be cowardice to refuse. That he believed himself to be retaining a large measure of independence is plain from his letter of acceptance: "I don't doubt that the party of which the present government are the head will give me credit for being sincerely attached to them and their interests; but I hope that in case any circumstance should occur to remove them from power, they will allow me to consider myself at liberty to take any line I may at the time think proper. The experience which I have acquired during my long service abroad has convinced me that a factious opposition to the government is highly injurious to the interests of the country; and thinking as I do now, I could not become a party to such opposition, and I wish that this may be clearly understood by those persons with whom I am now about to engage as a colleague in government." This sounds very well. The difficulty was that, when Wellington had once become a member of the Tory Party, he was not in fact prepared to relapse into independence. On the contrary he expected the party to follow him with docility in any line which

he took, however alien from their habits and prejudices. The Tory Party was to consist of followers of the Duke of Wellington. "What is the meaning of a party if they don't follow their leaders? Damn 'em! Let 'em go."

All these difficulties which were inherent in his position were kept within bounds as long as Lord Liverpool was Premier. He had been Wellington's political chief in the Peninsula, when they got to know, respect, and confide in each other; his tact and businesslike capacity kept the Cabinet together and prevented the jar of personalities and principles within it from becoming disruptive. With his retirement all the suppressed problems cried out for an immediate solution, while Wellington's ambitions had so grown that he was not prepared to leave the leadership in hands which he thought inferior to his own. Yet he was thoroughly unsuited for political leadership because he could never understand that political colleagues are not military subordinates. "One man wants one thing and one another; they agree to what I say in the morning and then in the evening up they start with some crotchet which deranges the whole plan. I have not been used to that in all the early part of my life. I have been accustomed to carry on things in quite a different manner: I assembled my officers and laid down my plan, and it was carried into effect without any more words." Here speaks the military hierarch, determined

to command where he considers that he has a right to obedience. Yet it was only within the limits of what he conceived as his legitimate authority that the Duke was a dictatorial man. When confronted with his equals, relying on the weapon of persuasion and aiming at conciliation, he was always an excellent diplomat. He had a detached and realistic mind in dealing with foreign affairs, always exact to recognise the limits of the possible.

Consequently it was no accident that he was chosen by Liverpool for two important diplomatic missions – in 1822 to Verona, and in 1825 to St. Petersburg. The former indeed ended, as it was bound to do, in failure on the main issue of French intervention in Spain, for the other Powers gave France leave to destroy the revolutionary virus there. But the very restricted character of the intervention which prevented any breach between the two Western Powers on this extremely touchy subject was largely due to Wellington's plain words to the ambitious French Cabinet. His journey to St. Petersburg was ostensibly to congratulate the new Czar, that austere and unbending Muscovite Nicholas, on his accession. Its real object was to prevent him from attacking the Turk single-handed on behalf of Greek independence, and so raising the spectre of the Eastern Question, that frequent harbinger of a general war. It is not within the scope of this book to trace the intricate

manœuvres which at length set the Greeks free. It will suffice to say that the Czar was persuaded for the time to work with Great Britain and France, the Mediterranean Powers. On the other hand, Greek independence was recognised in principle, and a contingent threat of force against the Porte crept into the protocol. Wellington's arrangements were in reality a step towards the battle of Navarino, which he deplored, and Russia's campaign against Turkey next year, which he deplored yet more. Still he achieved what is often the highest measure of success open to diplomatists – delay ; and through that delay peace between the Great Powers remained unbroken, and Greece crawled into freedom. It was a satisfactory end, even if some of the stages were dangerous.

The other principal service which Wellington rendered his colleagues was to take the King in hand. George IV was by no means a fool, but apart from his morals, which were beastly, he was vain, shifty, and sly. He liked intriguing against his Ministers, and disliked doing what they wanted. Wellington was the only man who could keep him in order. George admired his “ dear Arthur,” probably had a real affection for him, and certainly had a real fear of him. The Duke was blunt in his methods ; he did not play the courtier, but went on until he got what he wanted. “ I make it a rule never to interrupt him, and when in this way he tries to get rid

of a subject in the way of business which he does not like, I let him talk himself out, and then quietly put before him the matter in question, so that he cannot escape from it."

Had Wellington resigned office when he succeeded the Duke of York as Commander-in-Chief in 1826 he would have left a modest but unblemished political reputation. It was certainly not a Cabinet to raise his reputation, but he had done sound sensible service both in his own department and abroad. If he had now undertaken with all his power the reorganisation of the army, which had fallen into a slough of neglect, the miserable story of the Crimean muddle might have remained unwritten.

Unfortunately, as the French say, "*L'appetit vient en mangeant.*" After nine years' experience of a Cabinet he thought himself quite capable of taking over Liverpool's inheritance. On the whole the verdict that Wellington was the worst Prime Minister of the nineteenth century is justified. He had, as we have seen, a theory of his relationship to his colleagues and his party which made true representative government impossible. But apart from this the exercise of political power brought out all the worst side of his nature. A cruel epigram credited him with "a social contempt for his intellectual equals, and an intellectual contempt for his social equals." The querulous insolence of his quarrel

with Canning over the succession,¹ and his abrupt shaking off of Huskisson are notorious instances of the unpleasant way in which he treated those whom he did not regard as gentlemen. No less characteristic were the snubs which he administered to great nobles whose stupidity jarred his nerves. "Newcastle addressed me a letter on the subject of forming an administration and I treated him with contempt. I was wrong ; no man *likes* to be treated with contempt." A noble colleague received a memorandum dealing with his own department inscribed with the insulting minute : "This is for your personal information : I do not want any observation or suggestions on it."

His simplicity in thinking aloud in the House of Lords with the exaggerated emphasis of the inconsidered moment led him into some famous *boutades*. When defending himself from the charge of wishing to supplant Canning he not merely stated that he was not qualified to become the head of the Government but actually blurted out : "My Lords, I should have been worse than mad if I had thought of such a thing." This was not a good preparation for the acceptance of that very office a few months later. Even more harmful to his prospects was his complaint

¹ In this connection the Duke committed what may be fairly described as his one unpatriotic act. He not only refused to join Canning's administration, which he had a perfect right to do, but in a fit of pique threw up the non-party office of Commander-in-Chief in order to embarrass the Ministry.

of "the manner in which I have been treated by the corrupt press in the pay of the Government." He had always kept alive a deep grudge against newspapers for their reckless publication of details of military importance during the war ; but to make enemies of his own Tory editors by so sweeping and unjust a charge was wanton folly. Time after time his colleagues were to tremble at these terrible naked utterances.

Though he professed great dislike for his position, he bore himself as Prime Minister with an arrogance and over-confidence strangely unlike his demeanour as a soldier. "I am the most popular Minister that England has ever seen ; take my word for it, I am very strong" ; or again : "The Government is very popular ; and indeed there is but little opposition." So he went on to his intimates, but such optimism was no more than a desired delusion. It would have been hard for the most consummate manager to have created a stable Tory Government at that moment. As a large section of the party educated by Canning and Peel knew well, the old policy of repression and negation had already gone on far too long. Except a common name, and a common dislike of any serious parliamentary reform, there was no bond of unity between them and the Ultra-Tories, who controlled so many of the nomination boroughs. Even in ordinary times, with a wise constitutional monarch to moderate and advise, it would have been

difficult to drive so ill-matched a team. As it was, that decayed and shifty voluptuary, George IV, was a great additional stumbling-block in the critical path ahead. However within six months the Cabinet gained in homogeneity what it lost in intellectual strength, for after the dismissal of Huskisson it was deserted by the Canningites and became "true blue" Tory. Singularly enough, it then proceeded under the Duke's spur to pass a measure more distasteful to the average Tory mind than anything which had reached the statute book for a generation.

Wellington deserves the credit of seeing that Catholic emancipation must be immediately granted. He perhaps alone of all the public men of his time could ignore the taunt that his conversion was due to fear at the Clare election and O'Connell's menacing organisation of the Catholic Association. He also, with the possible exception of Peel, was alone able to force unequivocal assent from the wretched King. It required all his firmness and persistence.

For these reasons his conduct in driving the measure through in spite of the fiercest vituperation of a majority of Tories is defensible and even laudable. It is most improbable that the Whigs, its natural sponsors, could even have formed a Government. But his followers were naturally infuriated to find that their chief treated as a mere matter of expediency a sacred principle in whose veneration they believed him to share. Thus to

despise the political philosophy of a party was really to make representative government impossible. It was not without reason that the Duke was often styled a dictator. He loathed the idea of ruling by force, and once said publicly, with tremendous sincerity, that he would sacrifice his life to avoid a month of civil war. Yet he had the dictatorial mind in that he believed that the executive should be superior to the legislature, and must determine on grounds of expediency what is best for the State without considering loyalty or consistency with the party tradition. "*Videant consules ne quid detrimenti respublica capiat.*"

Wellington was led astray by his firm belief that war provided an exact analogy for the tactics of political strife. In war however the object of the enemy is to destroy or cripple the State. Whereas, in English political controversy at least, each party is equally zealous for the State's welfare, but differs in its conception of its attainment. He regarded emancipation as the voluntary destruction of the outwork of a fortress, with the object of making the fortress itself more secure. The fortress itself as he saw it consisted in the existing constitution based on the supremacy of the landed class. But in reality the destruction of the outwork did not put new heart into the garrison ; on the contrary it made them cry "Treachery" and mistrust their leader. Wellington's analogy would justify repression

or civil war but not his own parliamentary tactics. If he really thought his opponents were bad citizens, whose aim, conscious or unconscious, was revolution, it was a sheer mistake to seize a part of their programme in the improbable hope of thereby placating them from putting the remainder into effect. The method of Mussolini or Hitler is the appropriate one against bad citizens who are trying to ruin the State. "Ecrasez les factions," as the French Revolutionaries said with their emphatic logic.

Wellington never reached the illuminating certainty that all who opposed him were scoundrels. Warlike metaphors came naturally to him because he had waged war for half his life ; but just for that very reason he was profoundly reluctant to lift up his hand against his fellow-countrymen. In fact his hatred of war made him a far more constitutional Minister than his theory of carrying on the King's Government would allow. Wellington's administration, though far from successful, is memorable in English history. Catholic emancipation is the forerunner of all those reforming measures which gradually achieved substantial religious equality. Hardly less important was Peel's tenure of the Home Office, during which he completed his merciful mitigation of the penal laws, and established the police force to prove a model for the world. Finally, history will always relate that the Duke

was the second Premier¹ and the last Minister to fight a duel while in office. His encounter with Lord Winchilsea was not the outcome of a fit of passion, but was calculated to silence the furious voices of the Ultra-Tories by fastening the quarrel upon one of their fiercest champions. Wellington had indeed been grossly insulted by a charge of Machiavellian ill faith, yet his action was widely condemned. Duelling was fast going out of repute. The Duke had been one of its severest censors amongst his officers during the Peninsular War. Everyone recognised that he had no need to prove his courage in this fashion. Nor indeed did he do so ; for it was almost certain that anyone challenged by the Duke would act as his opponent did and fire his pistol into the air. He himself remained perfectly convinced of the propriety of his conduct. "The system of calumny was discontinued. . . . I am afraid that the event itself shocked many good men. But I am certain that the public interests at the moment required that I should do what I did."

His Government persisted until the close of 1830, but the reasons for its fall will be more appropriately considered in the next chapter, as they were inextricably bound up with the ever-swelling clamour for parliamentary reform.

¹ The earlier precedent was the duel between the younger Pitt and Tierney.

CHAPTER X

REFORM

Wellington on the perfection of the existing system – his fear of revolution – general unpopularity – attempt to form an administration in May 1832 – inconsistency of his conduct – final waiving of opposition to the Bill.

THE DUKE'S ATTITUDE towards reform exhibits in the most exaggerated aspect all his political characteristics. He had an extraordinary veneration for the mystical perfection of the existing composition of Parliament. It can be best expressed in the famous sentences which he blurted out in reply to Grey in the House of Lords (November 1830) : " I have never read or heard of any measure . . . which can in any degree satisfy my mind that the state of the representation can be improved, or be rendered more satisfactory than at the present moment. . . . I am fully convinced that the country already possesses a legislature which answers all the purposes of good legislation. I will go further and say that the legislature and the system of representation possesses the full and entire confidence of the country. I will go still further and say that if at the present moment I had imposed on me the duty of forming a legislature for any country, and particularly for a country like this, in possession of great property of various descriptions,

I do not mean to assert that I could form such a legislature as you possess now, for the nature of man is incapable of reaching such excellence at once ; but my great endeavour would be to form some description of legislature which would produce the same results." "Have I said too much ?" he asked his neighbour as he sat down. "Only that we are going out," replied the candid friend. And so it proved ; the Government had fallen within a fortnight, and the Whigs were in at last.

Wellington praised and defended the existing constitution of Parliament because "having in it as a member every man noted in the country for his fortune, his talents, his science, his industry, or his influence, the first men of all professions in all branches of trade and manufacture, connected with our colonies and settlements abroad and representing, as it does, all the States of the United Kingdom, the Government of the country is still a task almost more than human. To conduct the Government would be almost impossible, if, by reform, the House of Commons should be brought to a greater degree under popular influence : yet let those who wish for reform reflect for a moment where we should all stand if we were to lose for a day the protection of Government."

He and his opponents were poles apart. They denied both his premises and still more emphatically his conclusions. The House of

Commons did not in fact contain so rare a selection of different types of excellence. But, even if it did, the method of their election, which in nearly half the whole number was indistinguishable from nomination, made the task of government not easier but harder. "A further degree of popular influence" was the one thing which would facilitate the ever-increasing complexity of governing a free people. The agitation which had already begun in 1830 through the example of the July Revolution in France was not a symptom of more desperate violence after reform had been gained, but a burning intention to attain a just settlement without further delay. Wellington was profoundly mistaken in his view of popular psychology. He believed that the mass of the people were panting for reform in order to indulge in "red ruin and the breaking up of laws." He was convinced that the passage of the Bill would destroy the greatness of the country not by a slow process of gradual decay but with catastrophic completeness. "You may rely upon it that neither Lord Grey, nor any nobleman of his order, nor any gentleman of his caste, will govern the country six weeks after the Reform Parliament will meet, and that the race of English gentlemen will not last long afterwards." In another prognostication he wrote: "I have always considered the Reform Bill as fatal to the constitution of this country. It was a matter of indifference whether the House of Peers should

first be destroyed by the creation of peers to carry the Bill, or should fall with the other institutions of the country."

Wellington's opposition was not contaminated, as was that of so many, by any personal selfishness. As he wrote, "I have no borough influence to lose, and I hate the whole concern too much to think of endeavouring to gain any. Ask the gentlemen of the Cinque Ports whether I have ever troubled any of them."

He regarded aristocratic government as not less necessary for the country than it was for the army. He had always shown himself unfair and often brutal to officers of low birth, and he certainly regarded honour as a practical monopoly of his own class. He would thoroughly have approved the *obiter dictum* of a repressive judge in Pitt's day: "As for the common people, what have they to do with the laws except to obey them?"

As a result it was far from inappropriate that the London mob should fasten with particular fury upon the Duke as the symbol and protagonist of the anti-reformers. When he refused to illuminate Apsley House in honour of the second reading his windows were shattered by stones at the moment that the Duchess was lying dead within. In later years, when surrounded by cheering crowds as he rode home, he pointed grimly with his whip to the iron shutters, set up as a protection. On Waterloo Day, 1832—"a

curious day to choose," as he remarked—his life was seriously threatened by a yelling throng all the way from the City to the West End.

This iron resistance to the Bill in all its earlier stages is perfectly intelligible, even to those who with subsequent history before their eyes condemn it as a delusion. Far otherwise was his conduct when the Bill reached the House of Lords in its last journey and began to receive mutilation at their hands. It is scarcely credible that when Grey resigned on the King's refusal to create a substantial number of peers, Wellington tried to take office in order to carry an *extensive* (his own words) measure of reform. And he did this at the very moment when he was writing: "I am as much averse to the Reform as ever I was." Even Peel wrote: "For me individually to take the conduct of such a Bill . . . would be in my opinion personal degradation to myself. . . . I do believe that one of the greatest calamities that could befall the country would be the utter want of confidence in the declarations of public men which must follow the adoption of the Bill of Reform by me as a Minister of the Crown." At first sight one might suppose that Wellington was guilty of the most cynical unscrupulousness in order "to dish the Whigs" at the last moment, when they found themselves in a difficulty. It is a high tribute to his character that even in the fierce rancour of the moment his opponents did not impute so low a motive. He was obsessed

with the notion that he was the King's servant, and must be ready for any sacrifice, however disagreeable, in order that "the King's government can be carried on." "No embarrassment, no private consideration, shall prevent me from making every effort to serve the King."

It does not seem to have occurred to him until he had failed in his hopeless task that there was an obvious alternative. Two things might be taken for granted by any reasonable observer. First, if the Bill did not pass there would be a revolution; secondly, the Tory Party could not undertake any responsibility for passing it. But it could consistently either yield to *force majeure* or waive its opposition at the last moment in the public interest. The course to be preferred depended on the effect an *ad hoc* creation of peers might be expected to have on the character and prestige of the House of Lords.

Wellington then could either have advised the King to agree to Grey's demand, which in fact he was obliged to do when the latter resumed his Premiership, or he could have intimated the intention of himself and his friends not to pursue opposition any further by their votes. This was the course which he finally took and which enabled the Bill to pass without any creation of peers. Doubtless he would have been blamed in either case by one section of the party, but he would have preserved himself from the most compromising and even ludicrous position of

trying to stand sponsor to a child whose very existence filled him with dismay and abhorrence.

Nothing proves more conclusively the conviction which his countrymen felt of his sincerity and truth than that barely thirty months after this fiasco he was again holding high office with the general approval though not the general support of the nation.

CHAPTER XI

OLD AGE OF A HERO

Wellington's fears about reform falsified – no longer the Tory leader – in office again in 1834 – attitude towards Melbourne
• – Commander-in-Chief again – his various activities – correspondence – repeal of the Corn Laws – the Chartist procession – death.

WHILE it is singular to reflect that within seventeen years of Waterloo its conqueror could not go abroad in London without a pair of pistols and the execration of the crowd, it is no less singular that within a few more years he had been exalted by the common voice of his countrymen to a position which Mr. Guedalla aptly describes as “apotheosis.”

The Duke did not fail to see the limits of the possible. He agreed with Peel that a policy of mere reaction was suicidal. If the Tories pinned their electoral hopes on the repeal of the Bill they were doomed. It is no accident that the term Conservative begins to displace the ancient and honoured nickname. Besides, events proved him at once a false prophet. The new Parliament contained a few odd figures like the ex-prize-fighter Gully ; it had a dingy look – “I never saw so many shocking bad hats in my life” – but it was sensible, earnest, and far from extreme. Grey and his exceedingly aristocratic Cabinet remained

in power. It was soon proved that their danger lay rather from the right than from the left. The Conservatives began to revive ; they won seats with the suffrages of the ten-pound householders, so oddly depicted in 1832 as the furious harbingers of a bloody revolution. Both parties began to see that the only threat to the existing order lay in those excluded from the franchise, whom neither of them intended to include. The rise of the Chartists was for some time a guarantee against internecine war between the two old antagonists. Their motto might be crystallised in the Thucydidean description of Periclean Athens : " It was intended as a democracy, but in reality they allow the most powerful people to govern."

In consequence there was no need for Wellington to stand out any longer as a party chief. He was utterly disillusioned as to the attractions of political power. He had already written in 1829 : " If I had known in January 1828 one tithe of what I do now . . . I should never have been the King's Minister, and should have avoided loads of misery. However I trust that God Almighty will soon determine that I have been sufficiently punished for my sins, and will relieve me from the unhappy lot which has befallen me." Besides, the much younger Peel, who " played on the House of Commons like an old fiddle," was by now pre-eminently fitted to wear the mantle of Pitt and Canning. There was no place again for the Duke as Premier. However,

like most men who have lived continuously in great employments, he would feel neither happy nor conscious of doing his duty to a country which had loaded him with so many favours if he were not within the inner ring of government. Consequently he was always ready to take office if desired to do so, but he was no less ready to give advice out of an honest and true heart to the sovereign and his Ministers when his party was, as usually happened, in opposition.

The first occasion came in the autumn of 1834, when William IV arranged a more or less amicable dismissal of the enfeebled Whig Ministry. It was a curious moment to choose, for Peel, the designated Premier, had gone off to Rome. Wellington must have found enough to do during the interim to satisfy even his exacting standards of laboriousness. The number of his portfolios rivalled that held by modern dictators. He was First Lord of the Treasury, Home, Foreign, and Colonial Secretary. It took nearly a month to bring Peel home, for there was no telegraph and no railways on the Continent. Travelling post-haste, he just managed to do the journey in the same time as the Emperor Hadrian, seventeen hundred years before. Such was the condition of communications a mere century ago. To-day a man can fly from Rome to London in ten hours.

Peel dissolved Parliament and produced the famous Tamworth manifesto, which established modern Conservatism on a basis of cautious

progress. "If the spirit of the Reform Bill implies merely a careful review of institutions, civil and ecclesiastical, undertaken in a friendly temper, combining with the firm maintenance of established rights the correction of proved abuses and the redress of real grievances – in that case I can for myself and my colleagues undertake to act in such a spirit and with such intentions." Much indeed had been learnt in the last two years, and the Conservatives came back nearly double in strength, increasing from 150 to 270. This however was not enough; O'Connell led his Irishmen into the Liberal lobby, and Peel had to go (March 1835). The Conservatives were out for six years, and Melbourne reigned in their stead.

No Whig chief could have done more to allay the Duke's already diminished fears. Melbourne's favourite comment on any proposal brought before him was, "Can't you leave it alone?" Moreover the advent of the young Queen in 1837 tended to soften the strife of parties, particularly as it came to be realised with what exact and exquisite care the old Whig was educating Victoria in every branch of her constitutional duties. Wellington was especially able to appreciate this; for he had many opportunities of witnessing the personal relations between the two. Consequently during these years he became often an unofficial supporter of the Government, which he helped to maintain in

office, much to the fury of many ardent Tories. Embarrassed as they were by the rebellion in Canada and the Sikh threat in India, Ministers sought his advice on these questions of military policy. They received in return the clear memoranda for which the Duke had so masterly a gift. That on India made a particular impression of his accurate and retentive memory, for it is said to have been drafted without reference to maps or books, although he had left the country nearly thirty-five years before. There is indeed reason for supposing that Melbourne would have welcomed him in an official seat, but Wellington declined the overture, remarking that "the truth is that *Coalitions* have a bad name. Everybody on all sides must be against them, that does not profit by them." In his opinion "the only chance that any Government has in England in these times is to take a very moderate course ; and to take its chance of support from the moderate men of all sides." This was in fact an intimation that Melbourne could rely upon him as long as he resisted the Radicals, who showed a natural and increasing restiveness.

Until he passed his seventieth year, the Duke's robust frame had resisted all serious illness ; nor had any infirmities of age come upon him except deafness, which was mainly caused by the bungling of a surgeon. But at the close of 1839 he had a slight stroke, the effects of which caused Greville to describe him on his next public

appearance as a ruin, with his clothes hanging loosely about him. This warning however did not lead to any curtailment of his activities; on the contrary he joined the Peel Cabinet of 1841, and actually resumed the office of Commander-in-Chief on the death of his old Peninsular subordinate, Hill (1842). His reappearance in the Government did good rather than harm, though his extreme deafness was embarrassing at meetings. Each of his colleagues when expressing an opinion would take a seat next the veteran to make sure that he would understand the proceedings.

It was otherwise with the headship of the army. He became more and more incapable of mastering the business, and more and more obstructive towards reform. It was only after the most determined opposition that he sanctioned any alteration in the old Peninsular musket – Brown Bess, “the queen of weapons,” by now entirely obsolete. “A proposal to train schools for the benefit of non-commissioned officers and men,” we are told, “made him furious.” He never forgave his friend and biographer Gleig, the Chaplain-General, for sponsoring this project, and never invited him again to his house. This gentleman has left a vivid account of his last years at the Horse Guards. “Regularly as noon came round the Duke got upon his horse and rode to the Horse Guards. He would accept of no help either in mounting or dismounting.

Arrived at the covered passage which separates what was once the Commander-in-Chief's office from that of the Secretary of War, he had nothing for it but to let himself down as well as he could from the saddle. A little crowd always collected . . . and on every face there was an expression of mixed reverence and alarm. Wearily the right leg scrambled, so to speak, over the croup of the saddle. Slowly and painfully it sank towards the ground, and then the whole body came down with a stagger, which was never witnessed without dismay. Yet nobody presumed to touch or even to approach him. He . . . made straight for the little room in which he transacted military business. But the business transacted there came in the end to be sometimes of the smallest possible importance. Not unfrequently he would fall asleep the moment he sat down and Adjutant-General, Quartermaster-General, and Military Secretary were all too full of respect to disturb him. They looked in one after the other each with his papers in his hand. They withdrew again silently, waiting till his bell should ring, and if it never rang at all, as was not unfrequently the case, they being familiar with his views and having numerous precedents to guide them, went on with the current business of the day to the entire satisfaction of themselves and of the army. On these occasions the Duke usually slept on till four o'clock, when his horses were brought round, and

he departed as he had come, the observed of all observers."

It is fair to say however that whenever our relations with France were bad he excited himself in impassioned memoranda to Ministers calling for an increase in the fighting services and a scheme of national defence. Beyond the fortification of some of the southern harbours little was done, as Ministers were obsessed with the greatness of the debt which the Napoleonic Wars had hung round the country's neck. It would have been more useful if the Duke had made the existing army as serviceable an instrument as possible, instead of demanding large increases, which he knew would not be granted. This however is a common failing in elderly and decaying soldiers, who thus shuffle out of their own immediate responsibility for preserving efficiency.

The Duke constantly complained in his old age that he was never left alone, that he had not a moment to himself. "Rest! Every other animal – even a donkey, a costermonger's donkey – is allowed some rest, but the Duke of Wellington never!" He was not exactly insincere in these outbursts, but it was very largely his own fault. He had never learnt how to "study to be quiet." Mixed up with his abiding sense of duty were vanity, restlessness, and an insatiable love of detail. He never refused anything that was urged upon him; so he gradually found himself

with a collection of offices, many no doubt practical sinecures like the Wardenship of the Cinque Ports, which brought with it his favourite residence, Walmer Castle. But others, as the Lord-Lieutenancy of Hampshire, or the Chancellorship of the University of Oxford, added appreciably to his responsibilities. The last named is a good example of his inability to say "No" under pressure. He recognised his unsuitability to preside over a great seat of learning ; for his Latin was of the standard "of the Remove at Eton" and displayed its inadequacy at his installation by a robust set of false quantities. But he did not find out beforehand that Peel was himself anxious for this honour, which a considerable body of supporters was offering to him ; and, on hearing of it, declined to withdraw on the ground that his own candidature was now too far advanced.

But by far the greatest self-imposed burden was his correspondence. He was bombarded by retired officers, beggars, quacks, busybodies, and autograph-hunters, in addition to the large legitimate post-bag of letters from friends and public men. Yet he would never keep a secretary ; he answered with his own hand, often at absurd length, every correspondent, however irrelevant or impertinent the missive. It was a weakness which had already manifested itself in his military career. He could never delegate attention to detail : his most highly placed staff

officers complained that they were treated as mere clerks. Still, in war it is better that the commander should occupy himself too much with detail rather than too little, though it is very probable that Wellington's excessive concentration of everything possible within his own hands had a bad effect on the leadership of the army in the generation after Waterloo. But the exaggerated form of its senile activities did little or no good to anybody, and gave the Duke much unnecessary worry and exertion, though one suspects that he would not have been happy without them. The fact was that he required occupation for every minute of his day, and his day was much longer than most people's, since he seldom slept for more than six hours. Hunting, riding, and shooting would at intervals take up great blocks of it; yet there usually remained over time for this voluminous letter-writing, a half-detested, half-desired routine.

Still, on the whole the Duke passed a happy old age; happier perhaps than might have been expected. For until he had reached late middle life the condition of England had remained curiously static owing to the inherited dread of the French Revolution and everything that it was supposed to represent. The world began to change rapidly just when Wellington's mental and intellectual arteries had thoroughly hardened; and when he was forced to realise that he could only hope to arrest these changes by kindling civil

war. Yet he was very far from miserable ; and mainly because, as we have seen, he gradually recognised himself as a false prophet of exaggerated evil. The changes had not in fact imperilled the institutions of the country ; they had not brought down society with a crash. On the contrary, one of their most curious effects had been to crown their principal opponent with the halo of a nation's respectful veneration. Everyone touched their hats to the aged figure riding in the parks or the streets ; strangers, to his great annoyance, tried to help him across crossings ; some went so far as to request a shake of his hand, to be rewarded with a curt snap, " Don't be a damned fool ! "

It was irreverently remarked by Anatole France of God the Father that " though immutable in essence he tended to grow milder as he grew older," and this is certainly true of Wellington. Though often intolerant of argument and brooking of no contradiction, he expanded freely in the presence of cronies like Creevey and Croker, or young disciples like Stanhope. Little though he knew it, and bitterly as he would have resented it, they and many others were busily taking down and preparing for the world his racy, pithy, and sardonic table-talk. The Duke was certainly an admirable talker. In directness, pungency, and common sense he often reminds one of Dr. Johnson. But, while the Doctor was often rude, the Duke was sometimes cruel, though far less often

than in the earlier days of his military power. Like many formidable and aggressive men, he not merely softened in old age but abandoned himself entirely to the amusement of young children. He who had treated his own sons with frequent harshness, and had preserved intact for their discipline the severest parade-manner, might be found constantly romping with the young in his last decade. This was not a manifestation of mere senility, for it was noted that until the very end his mind was as clear as ever ; he could always concentrate for a special occasion, though such concentration naturally became more and more difficult. It was rather that in his last years he allowed that emotional strain in his nature which he had so rigorously repressed to flow more readily. All his confidantes were dead – Lady Salisbury and Mrs. Arbuthnot, to whom he had opened his heart freely. He was too old for the liaisons with women in which he had generally rather amused than expressed himself. So he threw himself into the innocent and boisterous society of the young with the same zest with which he did everything.

There were now only two public occasions on which he was to play a great part in influencing decisions of importance, and these, characteristically enough, had to deal with retreat and defence. Bitter as was the misery in the country, Peel's Government had pursued its way peacefully enough until the potato scourge of 1845. Wellington had always reproached Peel with timidity, and

now he repeated the charge. "Rotten potatoes have done it all ; they have thrown Peel into his damned fright." But he did not feel passionately about the Corn Laws. It was far more important that the Queen should continue to enjoy the same stable Conservative Government. "My only object in public life is to support Sir Robert Peel's administration. . . . A good government for the country is more important than Corn Laws or any other consideration." Consequently he did everything in his power to prevent the break-up of the Cabinet ; and, when it returned to office after Lord John Russell's failure, he was no less active in helping to carry through the Bill for repeal. He engaged for the last time his unrivalled authority with the Peers. With the old sulky docility they reluctantly allowed it to become law. Yet his main object was unaccomplished, for within a month Peel was out and Wellington had sat at his last Cabinet as a Minister of the Crown.

It was not however the last time that he was present at a Cabinet meeting. In April 1848 there were deep forebodings in London. Revolution had swept over almost every European country except Russia. The threats and organisation of the Chartists made responsible men believe that it was about to cross the Channel and assail the nursery of peaceful settlement. A member of the Cabinet actually wrote to his brother, "This may be the last time I write to you before the Republic

is established.” And this was after hearing the Duke expound his plan for the defence of London, which he actually describes in the same letter. “The Duke of Wellington was requested to come to us, which he did very readily. We had then a regular Council of War, as upon the eve of a great battle. . . . After long deliberation, plans of attack and defence were found to meet every emergency. The quickness, intelligence, and decision which the Duke displayed were very striking, and he inspired us all with perfect confidence. Macaulay said to me that he considered it the most interesting spectacle he had ever witnessed, and that he should remember it to his dying day.” The strength of a defensive Wellington had always been held to lie in its concealment until the last possible moment. Let the police and the special constables deal with the Chartist procession, as though it was merely an ordinary street obstruction writ large. The troops would all be there, quietly in garrison of vital strategical points, but they were not to be shown or used except in extremity. In these dispositions we see not merely the Peninsular veteran but the hater of civil wars. As everyone knows, the peaceful issue proved the truth of Wellington’s confident predictions, while the monster petition found its way to the House of Commons in the homely, respectable interior of a hansom-cab.

For four more years the Duke jogged quietly along in his self-imposed harness, still regular in

his attendance at public functions, still occasionally making a speech in the House of Lords. Most appropriately, his last appearance there was to recommend a Bill for the reorganisation of the militia introduced by Lord Derby's transient Government in 1852. But almost everything that the Duke did was appropriate, and his death was no exception. On September 14th that year, after a day of normal activity and his usual excellent sleep, he said to his valet on being called, "I feel very ill ; send for the apothecary." Such were his last words, no less characteristic than the dying Palmerston's optimistic request for a mutton chop. He sank into a coma, and expired so peacefully that it was necessary to put a glass before his lips to make certain that the breath had finally departed.

His simplicity of life was rewarded with the most gorgeous funeral ever given to a subject, while the nobler part of his memory is worthily enshrined in the stately cadences of Tennyson's ode.

CHAPTER XII

CHARACTERISTICS

Uniqueness of Wellington's career – appeal of his character to Englishmen – duty – thoroughness – common sense – truthfulness – simplicity – his defects – insensitiveness – sarcasm – ingratitude – incapacity for friendship – his personal appearance.

THE CAREER of Wellington is without parallel in English history. No other soldier has been so long and so intimately associated with political power after the close of his victorious service in the field, or has occupied in old age the same pedestal of universal national homage. Doubtless this can be to some extent explained by the fact that he began so early and ended so late. But it is a very inadequate explanation. Soldiers have been allowed an extraordinarily small share in the government of this country. Their interference in politics has been deeply resented; even Marlborough at the height of military success owed his downfall to his close association with the strife and intrigue of parties at home. Cromwell is of course no parallel, for he was the statesman turned soldier of necessity in order to make his political views prevail, and he maintained his supremacy, as he had won it, by the sword or its threat. The real explanation must

be found in Wellington's character, which induced his countrymen to favour him with a distinction so unique. He was certainly not a lovable man, nor one who ever condescended to truckle in the smallest degree to popularity. But though born and brought up in Ireland he was, as he always considered himself, a thorough Englishman. Indeed he fully shared the ordinary English view of the Irish—that they were a rebellious people who must be kept under by force.

It cannot be maintained that he was a typical Englishman, or even a typical English aristocrat, but he possessed to a remarkable degree those qualities which the English expected of their governors.

His whole life, as we have seen, was animated by a tremendous sense of duty. He lived with unusual consistency in accordance with the expression of faith which he made soon after returning from India: "I am *nimmuk wallah*, as we say in the East. I have eaten of the King's salt, and therefore I conceive it to be my duty to serve with zeal and cheerfulness when and wherever the King or his Government may think fit to employ me." Patriotism as personified in the sovereign was the mainspring of this duty rather than religious belief. In later life Wellington defended himself with earnestness and unusual humility against the charge of irreligion in a letter to the Bishop of Exeter: "What I am particularly anxious to remove from your mind

is the notion that I am a person without any sense of religion. If I am so, I am unpardonable ; as I have had opportunities to acquire, and have acquired, a good deal of knowledge on the subject. I don't make much show or boast on any subject. I have never done so. . . . As I have said before, I am not ostentatious about anything. I am not a 'Bible Society man' upon principle, and I make no ostentatious display of charity or of other Christian virtues, though I believe that . . . there is not a charity of any description within my reach to which I am not a contributor, although I am convinced, and indeed know, that many of them are gross jobs. The next objection is, 'He does not go to church !' Whenever or wherever my presence at church can operate as an example, I do go." The tone of this interesting letter, so obviously sincere, is itself enough to prove that he was not one of those who live always "in the great taskmaster's eye." Religion to him was one of many duties, all of which should be exactly performed.

Duty implies thoroughness. If a thing ought to be done, it must be done as well as possible. Few men have been greater masters or lovers of detail than the Duke. His well-ordered and retentive mind was unforgiving towards bungling or incompetence. He sometimes showed an unexpected sympathy with lack of nerve, but reserved his most terrible and caustic rebukes

for a mistake. Endowed with a robustness which defied fatigue, he did not realise that it was physically impossible for many men to get through more than a fraction of the work which he despatched without exhaustion. His record in the Peninsula is amazing. He never went on leave, and never had a holiday, except for a few days during his visit to Cadiz in January 1813. Even in those days of hard living his officers were astonished at his unflagging vitality. He had the priceless gift, so common among men of action, of needing but little sleep, and being able to sleep at will. Six hours was all that he allowed himself, but he could rely upon that. "I don't like lying awake; it does no good. I make a point never to lie awake."

It is obvious that intense concentration upon detail does not by itself make a great man; it may equally make a pedant or a formalist. Genius is not simply "an infinite capacity for taking pains." Wellington however was the master and not the slave of his detail just because of his transcendent common sense. This is the quality above all others which both contemporaries and historians have unanimously agreed was his in the fullest measure. It is no doubt a prosaic quality, and seldom goes with much imagination. It certainly did not with Wellington. Its limitations became apparent when the Duke tried to govern England, for, as Disraeli knew well, you cannot govern a great country

without imagination. It showed at its best when the matter at hand was one particular problem, however complicated and ramified. This is why Wellington's greatness is most clearly seen in the six Peninsular years. Everyone who has not studied them in detail is certain to underestimate his true stature.

All these characteristics are thoroughly in harmony with Wellington's noblest quality – his passion for truth. "Truth-teller was our English Duke," wrote Tennyson with a poet's discernment. The highest tribute which Wellington could pay to the memory of Peel was the emphatic recognition in the latter of the same quality. "In the whole course of my communications with him I never knew an instance in which he did not show the strongest attachment to truth ; and I never saw, in the whole course of my life, the smallest reason for suspecting that he stated anything which he did not firmly believe to be the fact." He consistently refused to allow the dedication of books to himself, on the ground that he had not time to read them beforehand, and would not allow his name to be used as a possible guarantee of their authenticity. When he commissioned Colonel Gurwood to edit his despatches, he stipulated that nothing whatever should be omitted except such names as might cause pain to living persons. He has had his due reward ; for the reader must be impressed, not merely with the great practical ability of

their author, and with the trenchant clarity of his exposition, but also with his invincible straightforwardness. Although Napier was a most bitter opponent of the Tories, he was the only man to whom Wellington would give confidential information on the Peninsular campaigns, just because he believed that he would prove a truthful historian. Wellington's truth was blunt and direct; it was not wrapped up in any silken circumlocutions of speech. As we have seen, it sometimes threw great boulders of difficulty in his political path. But it was often most impressive and convincing. Just before the distraught and worn-out Castlereagh killed himself he had a last interview with Wellington. The latter, after listening to his wild words, said simply, "From what you have said, I am bound to warn you that you cannot be in your right mind." Castlereagh whispered in reply the agonised confession, "Since you say so, I fear it must be so." Wellington in fact had such a dislike of overstatement that his dry, curt utterances became proverbial. "By God, I've lost my leg!" Lord Uxbridge called out at Waterloo, when a cannon-ball took it off as the two commanders were riding together. "Have you, by God!" was the Duke's rejoinder.

To the end of his life he retained that "curious simplicity" which so greatly impressed Creevey and the other social gossips with whom he came into contact. Though he had great pride, he

was utterly lacking in self-consciousness. In all small matters he always did exactly what he felt like doing, without pausing to consider whether others would think the action odd or undignified. He had a bleak disdain for personal comfort. His little bedroom at Walmer, with its camp-bed and its barrack-room furniture, was long retained intact to display the Spartan severity of the old hero. He cared nothing when or what he ate, and his doctor attributed his first seizure largely to the fact that he had subsisted throughout the day of its occurrence on one Abernethy biscuit. "How do you like this dish?" asked Cambacères, the prince of French epicures, when presenting him with a masterpiece. "Oh, very good, but to tell the truth I don't notice what I eat." "And you come here to dine with me!" exclaimed the horrified gourmet. In the Peninsula his invariable reply to the questions of the staff as to the hour of starting and the food to be taken was "Dawn" and "Cold meat." No wonder that the unhappy Alava, the Spanish attaché, used to say in later years, "J'ai pris en horreur ces deux mots 'Dawn' et 'Cold meat'!"

Such a figure drawn in these austere yet attractive lines of strength and quiet assurance was well fitted to become legendary, and to serve as a model of the great, dutiful, aristocratic servant for generations still to come. Yet, as the reader must already have clearly discerned,

Wellington cannot stand before the bar of history in this severe, almost impeccable majesty. He had many failings, and they were not attractive. For, while the faults of Nelson flowed from the exuberance and waywardness of a loving, generous, and sensitive nature, those of Wellington emphatically did not.

Lord Roberts wrote the harsh sentence : "The more we go into his actions and his writings in detail, the more do we respect and admire him as a general, and the less do we like him as a man." Moreover Sir C. Oman, whose authority on at least part of his career is unrivalled, has expressed a reluctant acquiescence in this judgment. Though it does not seem to me to be fair, its grounds are easily intelligible. Wellington was singularly insensitive towards, and even contemptuous of, the feelings of those over whom he exercised command. It was not his immediate subordinates who suffered, for they were imposed upon him by the Horse Guards, and he had to make the best of them. An incompetent general was often rebuked by an icy silence : "By God, it was too serious to say anything." But less highly placed officers were sometimes treated with a cold cruelty all the more repellent because of its deliberation. It must be admitted that war gives as many temptations as opportunities for the harsh, peremptory, and brutal handling of inferiors. Napoleon in an access of rage would pour out

the foulest of insults. But Napoleon, as Wellington acidly remarked, was "never a gentleman," whereas Wellington claimed to represent "the gentlemen of England." Yet the use of biting sarcasm towards subordinates who cannot reply is not a gentlemanly quality, especially when its shafts are specially launched against men of humble social origins. Sarcasm is often a weapon of shyness, and it is possible that he had originally used it as a defence. But except in the rarest cases it is the very worst form of rebuke. Men will forget the most violent abuse long before they begin to forgive the sardonic thrust. At least three of his officers are known to have sought death at the enemy's hand after enduring their commander's scathing words. To sharpen the edge of sarcasm against a social inferior is unpardonably mean. Wellington had a reasoned dislike of officers of low birth. He maintained that they could not easily command the obedience of the men, that "their origin would come out and you could never perfectly trust them." For that very reason he ought to have been most scrupulously fair in his treatment of them, but he was not. Gleig gives the following anecdote without suggesting that it was in any way exceptional. "Major Todd of the Staff Corps was an officer of considerable merit and famed for his skill as a bridge-maker. He was of humble origin, being the son, if I recollect right, of the butler of one of the Royal Dukes, through

whose influence he obtained a commission. It happened . . . that a bridge he had thrown over a stream gave way under the pressure . . . of a heavier piece than he expected would be advanced by that route. Tidings of the accident reached the Duke while he was at dinner. Having among other guests the Duc d'Angoulême near him, and knowing that the consequence must be considerable delay in executing the plan he had formed, he was furious. Unfortunately for himself Todd arrived just at this moment to explain and make his report. He was listened to in silence, and then in no measured language informed that his excuses were worthless and himself a bungler. Quite unprepared for such a reception, the Major stood riveted to the spot where he stood, close to the Duke's chair; whereupon, hurried away by temper, the Duke turned round and said, 'Are you going to take up your father's trade?' Poor Todd hurried out of the room. There was an action next day . . . in some vineyards. The officer commanding in that quarter chanced to have been present at the Duke's dinner . . . and seeing Todd approach on horseback rode up and tried to enter into conversation with him. Poor Todd took little or no notice, but trotted on in spite of the remonstrances of his companion. 'You have no business there, you can do no good; they can hardly miss you if you place yourself in an alley like that.' 'I don't want them to,'

was the answer, and almost immediately the poor fellow dropped dead, riddled with musket-balls."

With such a temperament it is not surprising that the Duke was often and bitterly accused in later years of ingratitude towards those who had served under his command. He had himself given to the utmost a devoted service, but after all he had been lavishly rewarded both in fame and money. It was far otherwise with the disbanded officers and men of that noble army over whose interests he had promised to watch in his final general order. It is of course true that no one man can secure the well-being of a multitude of soldiers thrown upon civil life. It is also true that courage and the capacity for command do not by themselves constitute a passport to employment. "Le courage," wrote a discerning Frenchman, "c'est une élégance"; it is no guarantee of moral worth. Yet Wellington's neglect contrasts very ill with the strenuous and consistent efforts which Haig made to protect and organise ex-servicemen after 1918. He even opposed the issue of a Peninsular medal, nor was the crowning glory of Waterloo so celebrated until the great majority of those entitled to receive it were dead. Fortescue makes much of the fact that he was always ready with a sovereign for any man who claimed to have served under him. But, to adapt Mr. Chesterton's famous line, this was only one of those easy actions which comfort callous men. The Duke was a very rich man, and an intermittent

sovereign cost him nothing and saved him the trouble of systematic investigation.

The truth of the matter is acutely expressed in the judgment of his judge-advocate-general, Larpent. "In truth, I think Lord Wellington has an active, busy mind, always looking to the future, and is so used to lose a useful man that as soon as gone he seldom thinks more of him. He would be always, no doubt, ready to serve anyone who had been about him or the friend of a deceased friend, but he seems not to think much about you when once out of the way. He has too much of everything and everybody always in his way to think much of the absent." Such an attitude is readily intelligible but it is not attractive. It goes far to explain why Wellington never had a friend, if friendship means intimate association on a basis of equality. He needed friendship all the more because of the hollowness of his married life; he used to complain that in spite of all his palaces he had no home. Perhaps Lady Salisbury was the most valued and happy recipient of his confidences, for their intimacy was free from the common reproach of his relations with women. She seems to have fulfilled his definition of a "clever woman" as one "who anticipates your meaning." The Creeveys, Crokers, and Arbuthnots were agreeable parasites, who drew the Duke out into reminiscence, and encouraged by their enticement his blunt pontifications; young aristocrats like Stanhope were adoring disciples.

There is something both pathetic and revolting in the fact that the lonely man brought Arbuthnot to live with him at Apsley House shortly after the death of the wife whose infidelity with the Duke he is generally supposed to have condoned over a period of many years. The old Roman malediction, "*Ultimus suorum moriatur*," finds its invariable fulfilment in an old age which cannot constantly renew the springs of friendship. Perpetual occupation brings not happiness but increasing restlessness.

It has often been remarked that there is a remarkable resemblance both in character and visage between the aristocratic governing class of England in the eighteenth century and the Roman senators and proconsuls of the Republic, whose busts are preserved in the museums of modern Rome.

The great Duke was cast in the authentic proconsular mould. Built upon the granite foundations of duty, thoroughness, and common sense, he had the supreme merit as a soldier of seeing and acting on the knowledge that no military problem is ever purely military. The true general must also be always administrator, economist, financier, mediator, and diplomatist. Wellington would never have qualified as the hero of an excitable and impressionable people, who would be far more repelled by his bleakness than impressed by his achievements. He was always patient in action, never flamboyant.

In person the Duke was exceedingly handsome, and was often known as "the Beau." He had none of the classic beauty of Castlereagh, surely the noblest in appearance of all the long gallery of our great public men. But his finely chiselled features and his habitual expression of cold yet alert majesty unite in creating a face which it seems inevitable to describe as aristocratic in every line. The immense hooked nose and the piercing eye combine to suggest the bird of prey. It is said that Wellington's vision was so intense that until the close of his life he could distinguish from Walmer the lighthouse at Cape Gris Nez, twenty-five miles away. The thin, tightly closed lips are a symbol both of his sardonic power and of his constant self-control and self-repression. In stature Wellington was rather above the middle height (about five foot ten inches), with a spare, trim, lithe figure, so appropriate for those astounding feats of endurance on horseback which would have exhausted many men with nothing else to do and no responsibilities to bear.

Character and appearance were indeed in singular harmony, as doubtless Wellington both wished and intended them to be.



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